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SCRIPTURE HISTORY,

IN

Familiar Lectures.

BY THE HON. AND VERY REV.

HENRY E. J. HOWARD, D.D.

DEAN OF LICHFIELD.

FIRST SERIES.

THE OLD TESTAMENT.



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I AM desirous of saying a word, in laying this little Work before the Public, with reference to the expression "familiar," used in its Title-page, which I hope may be understood as relating solely to the classes of persons to whom it is addressed, and in no degree to its sacred subject. It was originally composed, as many parts of its structure indicate, in the form of Lectures to be delivered by a Parochial Minister to his congregation: and to the elementary character required by such a design, as well as to its comparative state of readiness, may be attributed its early appearance in a series of volumes.

on every other account entitled to precedence. I feel myself bound to thank the Rev. Conductors of the "ENGLISHMAN'S LIBRARY," Messrs. E. Churton and W. Gresley, for the contribution of several valuable observations, of which I have made free use in the text and notes.

H. H.

LICHFIELD DEANERY.

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in the minds of those believers of that nation, whom false accusers of the apostle might have led to think ill of him, as preaching a doctrine in all respects contrary to, and subversive of, their ancient faith ; and, secondly, to render the teachers of Christianity aware how essentially necessary an accurate acquaintance with those Scriptures was to them in the performance of their work as evangelists, as well as in the discharge of their duties, as individuals, to God and man. We have therefore here St. Paul's deliberate assurance that, as an Article of our Church expresses it, " the Old Testament is not contrary to the New ;" but that the two, originating in one common inspiration, combine together for one harmonious object : that the holy Scriptures which the Jews received were able to make them wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus ; and to render the man of God, or christian teacher, perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Whatever then is here said in commendation of the Old Testament, is to be understood as said also of the New : both are given by inspiration of God ; both are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness : they are so in a high degree when considered separately, but in a still higher degree when taken together, throwing a mutual light upon each other, and affording an accordant testimony to God's wisdom and grace. Thus united, though consisting in fact of many books, written by different men in different ages of the world, and varying greatly as to the less important particulars of style and language, they form, when considered as to their prime Author—the Holy Spirit of God, and as to their main purpose—the salvation of mankind through Christ Jesus, one single book : deserving above all others, in consequence of the immense importance of its contents, the name of the Book, or as we are accustomed to

call it, from the Greek word of the same signification, the Bible ; meaning thereby the whole written word of God, the complete collection of the Scriptures.

We then, who live in the days when inspiration and miracle are over ; who see not the supernatural works of God, such as he performed in former times among his chosen people ; who enjoy not the benefit of Christ's personal presence, as did his first disciples,—instead of all such advantages, are in possession of the Bible : and it is enough. If we read it carefully, perseveringly, with a spirit of humble submissiveness to the Church's teaching, and with earnest prayer, we shall be guided by his Spirit, who gave it us, into a knowledge of all needful truth, and shall derive from the perusal of its blessed pages all joy and peace in believing, and be enabled to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. In the hope of contributing something towards an acquaintance with the contents of this holy book, I propose to lay before you in the succeeding lectures, as a continuous narration, the most important historical facts which it relates ; directing your attention, as I proceed, to any remarkable doctrinal or moral uses arising out of them.* These facts I shall endeavour to arrange, not so much in the order in which its component parts present themselves in the sacred volume, as in that of the events which it records ; and since in the execution of this purpose I shall be naturally led to dwell less upon any account of the books themselves, than upon the information which they afford us, it will perhaps not be unsuitable to offer, in this place, a few introductory remarks

* The Lectures here published are confined to the history of the Old Testament. The author has prepared a similar course on that of the New Testament, the publication of which hereafter will depend upon the reception that his present attempt may meet with on the part of those for whose benefit it is intended.

upon those principal portions into which the Bible is divided. Its chief division is into the two Testaments, the Old and the New: the word Testament being understood to mean the same thing as Covenant, or Dispensation, implying not so much the existence of any legal contract, as an offer of something advantageous on the one part, and its acceptance on the other. The Old Testament comprises all the holy Scriptures written before the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into the world; the New Testament, all those written after his coming. In applying the title of Old Testament to the former, we follow the example of St. Paul,* who has so called them in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians: they seem, however, to have been frequently considered by the Jews as divided into three great parts, known by the names of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms; which distinction of them it may be recollected that our Lord himself sanctioned by his adoption, saying to his disciples, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me."† There are, indeed, some passages of Scripture, in which "the Law"‡ seems used as a general name for the whole Old Testament; but it is usually considered as comprising only those five books with which the Bible commences, and which were written by Moses, the man of God. The first of these, called Genesis, or Creation, gives, as its name implies, a history of the creation of the world, and of the events that took place during its earliest ages, up to the arrival of Jacob in Egypt. The second, called Exodus, or going forth, is so called because it relates the manner in which God, by the

* 2 Cor. iii. 14.

† Luke xxiv. 44.

‡ John x. 34; xv. 25; 1 Cor. xiv. 21.

hand of Moses and of his brother Aaron, caused the children of Israel to go forth out of Egypt, after enduring much oppression under the tyranny of its king: it contains also an account of the giving of the law from Mount Sinai, by God himself, to the people whom he had chosen, and recounts its most important commandments. The third book, entitled Leviticus, is filled with minute directions as to the service of the Jewish tabernacle, ordained to be performed only by the tribe of Levi. The fourth is called Numbers, because in it is to be found a statement of the numbering of the people, during their stay in the wilderness, where they wandered for forty years, before their entrance into the promised land of Canaan. The fifth and last book of Moses is called Deuteronomy, or repetition of the Law, and was written shortly before his death, with the intention of reminding the people of all the statutes and judgments which they had previously received, and of the many wonderful events which had taken place since their departure out of Egypt—inducing them to place their full confidence in the Lord only, and to devote to him their undivided service. The conquest of the land of Canaan, and the partition of it among the tribes of Israel, form the subject of the book of Joshua; while that of Judges affords us some insight into their history during the period that elapsed before they began to be governed by kings. The book of Ruth is an interesting relation, full of the simplicity of ancient times, of the fortunes which befel a young woman of Moab, the widow of a man of the tribe of Judah, who, marrying her former husband's kinsman Boaz, became an ancestress of David, and, through him, of Christ. The first book of Samuel contains the life of the celebrated prophet of that name; of Saul, the first king, whom he anointed to reign over Israel; and the early history of David,

until the death of Saul. The second book contains the eventful and instructive reign of David, the man after God's own heart—who yet, being human, sinned in more than one instance before God, and received the punishment of his iniquity. It is plain that only a small portion of these books could have been written by Samuel:* the remainder was added after his death, probably by the prophets contemporary with David, Nathan and Gad. The first book of Kings contains an account of the reign of Solomon; the division of his kingdom after his death into that of the ten tribes, or Israel, and that of the two tribes, or Judah; which latter retained possession of the capital city Jerusalem, and of the temple built within it; and carries on the history of the divided kingdoms to the death of Ahab and of Jehoshaphat. The course of the narrative is pursued in the second book of Kings, up to the destruction of both these kingdoms; first, that of Israel by the Assyrians, and afterwards that of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean. In the two books of Chronicles, we possess a nearly similar relation, beginning with the reign of David, but dwelling with more particular detail upon the events which occurred within the kingdom of Judah. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah inform us of the steps taken by the Jews, after the termination of their captivity in Babylon, under the direction of these eminent men, to rebuild their city, and re-establish themselves in the possession of their land, having received permission to this effect from the kings of Persia, by whom their former enemies, the Chaldeans, had been conquered. The book of Esther relates a marvellous preservation of the Jewish people from a destruction devised against them by Haman, their bitter enemy, which Esther, being a Jewess, and

* 1 Chron. xxix. 29.

the favoured wife of the Persian king, was enabled to procure for them.

The book of Job affords a memorable example of patience under severe afflictions, in the person of the Arabian Job, as well as a most interesting specimen of the poetry of the eastern nations, and their manner of life in times of very high antiquity. Next in order of arrangement are placed the Psalms of David, united with some others penned by various writers, comprising the most valuable manual of devotion ever offered to man. The book of Proverbs is a rich collection of acute and impressive sentences, mostly, if not entirely, composed by Solomon, and profitable in the highest degree for instruction in righteousness. Two works succeed this, ascribed to the same sagacious author: the former called Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher, generally supposed to have been written by him in his latter days, when he had seen the folly of departing from the ways of God, and of looking to this vain and perishable world for any real enjoyment; the latter, called the Song of Songs, occasioned by his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, but representing also, in a spiritual manner, the mystical union which is betwixt Christ and his church. The Prophets, strictly so called, sixteen in number, conclude the volume of the Old Testament; to which must be added the book of the Lamentations, placed after the prophecies of Jeremiah, as written by him. In this part of the sacred writings, especially in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Zechariah, and Malachi, are to be found a variety of predictions concerning Christ, the greater portion of which were fulfilled during his stay upon earth, while the completion of the remainder is to be looked for, by his faithful servants, in the latter days. We come now to the second great division of the Bible, which to us Christians is an object of the greatest reverence and

affection; namely, the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The history of his birth, life, death, resurrection from the grave, and ascension into heaven, is first presented to our notice, as given by four of his disciples: two of them apostles, and eye-witnesses of that which they relate; the other two associates of the apostles, and consequently informed upon the very best authority as to the facts recorded by them. We have therefore the good tidings of salvation, or the Gospel, according to St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, who, on this account, are termed Evangelists; that is, declarers of the gospel. St. Luke, the friend and companion of Paul of Tarsus, has moreover given us a history of the Acts of the Apostles, after the ascension of Jesus, confining himself, however, more especially to that with which he was best acquainted—the proceedings of St. Paul. Thirteen epistles, written by that same apostle to various churches of Christ, principally those which he himself had founded, or to individual disciples, follow the history of his life; containing a most invaluable treasure of christian doctrine and practical admonition. The Epistle to the Hebrews, in which the insufficiency of the Levitical law, and the superiority of the christian dispensation, is fully shown, has been ascribed by the church to St. Paul also, though the name of its author is not to be ascertained from the epistle itself. We have next an epistle written by St. James, the brother of our Lord, to the twelve tribes which were scattered abroad; and two from the apostle Peter, addressed in a similar manner to his dispersed countrymen and fellow-converts to the religion of Jesus. Three epistles follow,—the first resembling rather a doctrinal and practical discourse, the other two addressed to individual Christians,—from the pen of St. John; with whose book of Revelation,

after a short epistle from St. Jude, the whole New Testament is concluded. From the brief account here given of the composition of the Bible, you perceive that it is made up of many books, written in various ages of the world, dictated however by one and the self-same Spirit, and combined into one perfect whole by their unity of object. Out of this sacred volume, it is the duty of God's ministers to teach you, the people entrusted to their care, the good and the right way; your duty is to pray earnestly for his heavenly help, that you may hear and read it with perseverance, with understanding, and with endless profit to your immortal souls. It is not to gratify a trifling curiosity, or to amuse a passing hour, that you are called upon to study this book—it is to acquire a knowledge of the things belonging to your eternal peace, to learn the grounds of all your hope of happiness, to understand the mercies of your God towards you, to accept the offered dispensation of grace, and to be wise unto salvation. “These things were written,” says the apostle John, “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”*



CHAP. II.

THE CREATION.

MAN, placed as he is in the midst of an universe full of wonders, which the more he investigates and understands them, delight and astonish him so much the more, is naturally prompted to ask the

* John xx. 31.

question, How these things began to be? Whether there was ever a time when the world was not; and if so, by what power it was called into existence, and subjected to the laws that govern it? The very first words of his Bible afford an answer to this question: they assure him that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,"* the whole material universe: it had therefore a beginning, and that beginning was a creation of something where nothing was before; and He who created it, was that all-wise and almighty Being, known by the name of God. In our reception of this testimony of God concerning himself, in our acknowledgment of Him as the Creator of all things, is laid the foundation of all true religion: our faith must exercise itself first upon this truth, and may then proceed to embrace and hold fast every other assurance, and doctrine, and promise of the Bible. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear;"† that is, the universe was a completely new creation: it was not, and God willed that it should be. This creation did not, however, take place all at once: it is divided into six days, or periods of time, during each of which some addition was made to the things previously existing, until the whole was completed. We have our habitation upon this planet, which is called the earth: what concerns it, therefore, is that which principally concerns us: the other parts of God's creation are accordingly only so far noticed in the Bible as they are connected with it, and exercise an influence over the well-being of mankind. The earth then, before its adaptation to the use of man, appears to have been a mass of matter, in a nearly fluid state, buried in profound darkness, but subjected

* Gen. i. 1.

† Heb. xi. 3.

to some sort of agitation or motion, produced by the Spirit of God, which moved, or brooded, upon the liquid surface. Things being in this state, God, by his powerful word, commanded the light into existence: "Let there be light," he said, "and there was light."* Of this great agent, which doubtless materially contributed towards reducing the earth into its present arrangement, he was pleased to signify his divine approval—"He saw the light, that it was good." It was good in itself, as the regulator and cheerer of the universe; and good as an emblem of that grace, which, through his only-begotten Son, should hereafter shine upon the world. The darkness still existed in some portions of the creation, where the light could not penetrate. The prevalence of darkness it seemed good to the Creator to call night, and the prevalence of light he called day. And thus the first period ended. Darkness had been succeeded by light; and thus, in the language of Moses, "the evening and the morning were the first day."† In the second period, the firmament, *i.e.* the air, or atmosphere, which covers the whole earth to a considerable distance upwards in every direction, and in the upper regions whereof the clouds and watery vapours are abundantly suspended, was created, and thus the waters were divided into portions—those on the surface of the earth, and those in the clouds of heaven; for "God," it is said, "called the firmament heaven."‡ And thus the second period ended. Hitherto the globe of the earth had presented an uniform and fluid surface; but now, in order to fit it for bringing forth its various productions, by God's command, this surface became partly dry, and that which continued liquid was gathered together into one place, and the earth, (so called in contradistinction

* Gen. i. 3, 4.

† Ver. 5.

‡ Ver. 8.

to the sea,) that is, the dry land, appeared, and thereupon became clothed with various grasses and trees, and other innumerable forms of vegetable life : and with this important advance towards perfection the third period was concluded. Thus far the light had been diffused at large throughout the whole circuit of the universe, wherever it was calculated to penetrate : but now it seemed good to the all-wise Creator to give it certain points of concentration, from which it should proceed in a visible manner, and serve purposes beyond those of mere illumination. He made, therefore, those which to us are its two chief receptacles—the sun and the moon ; one to afford it us by day, and one by night, which by their alternate shining they were ordained to distinguish from each other ; while by their relative positions to the earth at different calculable times they served to mark out the months, the seasons, and the years. “ He made the stars also,”* to serve the same great purposes in other parts of the heaven ; yet not devoid of benefit to us. And thus the fourth period came to its close. Life had existed in it, imperfect indeed, as being only the life of vegetation, and beyond this as yet no farther progress had been made : the earth had thus, however, been rendered fit for the abode of a higher class of beings, those, namely, endowed with animal life ; and no sooner was this the case than they were called into existence. The first of these were produced out of the waters. They “ brought forth abundantly the moving creature that had life”†—how abundantly may be plainly seen from the immense quantities of their remains, which still subsist, imbedded in the various rocks that form the outer surface of the earth, and very often compose nearly the whole of their substance. The enormous monsters of the deep, of whose now extinct species some bones

* Gen. i. 16.

† Ver. 20.

occasionally are found to excite our admiration, were next created, as well as the numerous tribes of birds which "flew above the earth in the open firmament of heaven."* And with the divine blessing of increase upon these, the fifth period had end. The waters had now done their part—the remaining animals of a higher order were produced out of the earth. Those vast and stately quadrupeds—those gigantic animals, the remains of which the researches of modern philosophy have brought to light—then began to roam through boundless forests, the undisputed possessors of the globe; and such they remained, till at the close of this sixth period, all being now prepared, God judged it fit to call into existence his noblest and most perfect work. He made man "in his own image, in the image of God;"† "in *our* image,"‡ he said, intimating thereby the three persons of the Godhead, "let *us* make man." Thus much and no more do we know of his creation: Adam, or the male, was first created, "of the dust of the ground, and the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,"§ (an expression not used when speaking of the inferior animals,) "and man became a living soul." It is a point on which we cannot speak with certainty, but it seems probable that those vast animals, till that time the occupants of the globe, had previously perished, and that man at the moment of his creation stood alone upon the earth."|| And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone: I will make him a help meet for him."¶ "And out of the ground the Lord

* Gen. i. 20. † Ver. 27. ‡ Ver. 26. § Gen. ii. 7.

|| The view here taken is to be found very fully and ably exhibited in an article which appeared in the "British Critic," July 1832; being a review of Mr. Sharon Turner's *Sacred History of the World*.

¶ Gen. ii. 18, 20.

God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam, to see what he would call them : and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him."

+ It would seem from this, that the formation of the creatures, such as exist at this day upon the earth, took place after that of Adam ; and none of them being found a help meet for him, the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon him, and took from him, while he slept, one of his ribs, and made it a woman, and brought her unto the man. Adam received the precious gift with becoming gratitude ; he took her unto him, saying, " This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."* He recognised their union as the strongest tie of which man is susceptible in his social state ; affirming that " a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh."† In this state of simplicity and innocence, unconscious of temptation or of shame, were they placed by their Maker in the garden which he had planted eastward in Eden, to dress it and to keep it. The situation of this garden has afforded matter to the learned of much curious research ; we can, however, hope to know little more concerning it than that it was in that part of Asia through which the two great rivers, the Tigris, then called Hiddekel, and the Euphrates, flow. The general deluge has probably effected much alteration in the condition of those countries ; and subsequent causes have concurred to render that which once was the paradise of God, a marshy and desolate wilderness. In this spot, now unknown to us, or barely guessed

* Gen. ii. 23.

† Ver. 24.

at, God placed our first parents, and pointed out to them its advantages and beauties. Two trees in particular there were, amongst many others, good for food and pleasant to the sight, deserving of their especial notice. These were—the tree of life in the midst of the garden, endued by God's good pleasure with so divine a virtue, that if they ate of it they would live for ever; and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, of which God said, "Thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."* With the exception of this one prohibition, they were freely admitted to the enjoyment of all the gratifications of that garden of delight: there they were left to pass, if they could resist temptation, days of immortal joy: they were only forbidden to do that which they were forewarned would put an end to their state of happiness, and bring death upon them. And now, the six days, or periods of time, in which creation was carried on, being completed, "God," it is said, "ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made."† In future, the processes of nature were to be conducted according to certain laws ordained by him, under his perpetual control and superintending providence, but no new thing was to be made: the same material substances would assume a vast variety of forms and conditions, sometimes perceptible to our mortal organs, and sometimes not, but they would never be utterly destroyed; continuing to exist and to discharge their appointed functions, until the consummation of all things at the last day. And God, willing that this, his cessation from the work of creating the world, should be had in perpetual remembrance by his reasonable creatures, ordained that every seventh natural day should be

* Gen. ii. 17.

† Ver. 2.

kept holy by mankind : “ He blessed it and sanctified it ”* as a day of rest, of rejoicing, and of worship—a day which softens the hardships of toil, and brings with it forgetfulness of worldly cares, and causes the beings, whom God has made, to remember their Creator, to love him, and to praise him. Two things there were which God ordained in Paradise—marriage, and the sanctification of his sabbath of rest : the one an emblem of that hallowed union which connects at this hour the Saviour Bridegroom with his bride the Church ; the other a type of that heavenly sabbath, which, as we are assured in the Epistle to the Hebrews, “ yet remaineth unto the people of God ; ”† of the time to come, when they who are entered into his rest shall cease from their own works, as he did from his. May we, then, hold them both in reverence, as creatures devoted to our Maker’s will, and as members incorporate in the mystical body of his Son, the blessed company of all faithful people. Abundant proofs have been afforded us, in the details of the creation now gone through, of the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of our Creator : we shall behold him next in the exercise of two other of his divine attributes—his justice and his mercy ; attributes, of which the revelation occupies the succeeding pages of the Bible ; of which the *full* disclosure will take place when the end cometh—when the Redeemer and Judge of all men shall appear in his glory, and the secrets of all hearts shall be unveiled, and every tongue shall confess to God.

* Gen. ii. 3.

† Heb. iv. 9, 10.



CHAP. III.

THE FALL OF MAN.

IN the account of the Creation given by Moses, no mention is made of any class of beings above the brute animals, of a different nature, or of a higher order than man. It is nevertheless highly probable, that in the numberless worlds which fill the starry firmament, inhabitants exist, suited to the peculiar circumstances of their situation; and it is certain from other parts of Scripture, that God did create and use for his own wise purposes, a multitude of intelligent beings, called spirits, or angels, of whom a portion continued steadfast in their obedience and love for him, while others fell away from this their first estate, and aimed at independence, and became workers of evil. The chief of these is called in Scripture by various names, but usually by those of Satan and of the Devil; the former signifying the adversary, and the latter, the accuser or calumniator; while in one passage of the book of Revelation, he is called in addition to these names, "that old serpent, which deceiveth the whole world."* This latter title of his deserves our particular attention, as affording us a key to the meaning of Moses, in that portion of his history on which we are now about to enter. His appellation of the old or ancient serpent, is calculated to carry back our thoughts to the very earliest ages; and if he deceives the whole world we shall feel no surprise, however much cause we may have for sorrow, if we find that even our first parents were not exempt from his delusions. We have every reason then, from the whole tenor of Scripture, to believe that it was he,

* Rev. xii. 9.

who, entering into the animal called the serpent, the noted subtilty whereof made it the fitter instrument for his deceitful operations, spake by its mouth to the woman, whom he contrived to approach when apart from her husband. He began by an affectation of surprise, that God should have forbidden them the use of every tree of the garden ; and when set right as to that point, by her assurance that there was but one tree forbidden them under the penalty of death, namely, that which stood in the midst of the garden, he dared to insinuate that their Maker had deceived them, both in keeping back the true reason for issuing his injunction not to eat of it, and in threatening them with such consequences of their disobedience as never would ensue. "He said to the woman, Ye shall not surely die ; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."* First, we see, he endeavoured to shake her confidence in God, and then to excite her to seek a state of guilty independence, and even equality with him—he taught her to look upon herself as one jealously kept down in a state of existence unworthy of her, and thus he practised upon her vanity and ambition, which he knew were among the weak points of the human heart. Moreover he seduced her to come within sight of the forbidden fruit, knowing how much the allurements of outward beauty contribute to temptation. Nor did his devices fail of their effect : she was deceived by them : she forgot God, and believed the tempter. Being then in the transgression, she lost no time in causing Adam to share it with her—"she ate herself, and gave also unto her husband, and he did eat."† He, we are told by St. Paul, "was not deceived"‡ as she had been : he saw the danger

* Gen. iii. 4, 5.

† Ver. 6.

‡ 1 Tim. ii. 14.

impending over her, and chose, in conformity with his first determination of cleaving to her, that she should not encounter it alone. The only immediate consequence of their eating of the fruit of knowledge was, "that they knew that they were naked"*—their simple innocence was gone—they looked upon each other for the first time with a feeling of shame. They soon invented some expedient for the covering of their bodies, but the shamefulness of sin they were unable to hide from themselves or from each other, far less from God. They attempted it, however; for when they heard his voice borne towards them upon the evening breeze, that which was once so sweet and pleasant to their hearing was now a sound of fear; and anxious to avoid, or to put off at least, the formidable interview, they "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."† So miserably poor was the result of their newly acquired knowledge, that they thought thus to escape from the sight of their Creator. And thus it is with sinners always; every sin indulged in makes them form more unworthy notions of God, till they begin to question his seeing them at all. "Tush, say they, how should God perceive it? is there knowledge in the Most High?"‡ But our guilty parents were not suffered to remain long in their fancied hiding-place. God called on Adam, and asked him to explain the reason of his unusual conduct; and when he pleaded his nakedness as his excuse, he soon found that this plea led him to the very point which he was most anxious to avoid. "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?"§ Adam could not deny it—but what he could he did: he endeavoured to relieve himself from some portion

* Gen. iii. 7. † Ver. 8. ‡ Psalm lxxiii. 11. § Gen. iii. 11.

of the blame, by throwing it principally indeed upon his guilty helpmate, but partly also, by implication, upon Him from whom he had received her. "The woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."* The principle of self-preservation prevailed here over the strongest ties of earthly affection: Adam, who had had hardihood enough to share his wife's transgression, was now desirous to save himself by throwing the main burthen of it upon her. Such is the heart of man! Can we sufficiently distrust its purposes? Can we watch the thoughts that arise out of it too carefully? Can we pray with too ardent a desire for its purification through grace? Can we be too cautious, lest we "say when we are tempted, I am tempted of God?"† It was next the woman's turn to answer: her confession was of a brief and simple character—acknowledging that she had been deceived, and pointing out the deceiver. "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."‡ She says nothing in answer to the charge of having led her husband also into sin: she could not do it without in a certain degree recriminating upon him, and in that case silence was her best apology. God having thus interrogated the two parties who had been guilty of the transgression, proceeded to pass sentence upon the evil being who instigated them to its commission, without previously putting him upon his defence, or inquiring into his motives. Such condescension, we may well suppose, would have availed nothing in the case of one so thoroughly depraved and vicious as this evil spirit, who, as our Lord says of him, is a liar, and the father of lies,§ and who, it may be, also had already deserted the creature which he had possessed to serve a temporary purpose, and left only the dumb serpent to encounter the curse of

* Gen. iii. 12.

† Gen. iii. 13.

‡ James i. 13.

§ John viii. 44.

God. Upon that animal the curse fell in part, in order to show Adam, by an additional instance, the vast evil of sin : it was reduced in future to crawl upon its belly on the ground, as we see serpents do, having before in all probability moved erect, and in consequence of its new position, was doomed to lick up the dust of the earth along with its food—living in a state of constant hostility to man, doing him some harm, but suffering more from his superior power. But it was on Satan, the evil one, for what he had done while possessing the serpent, that the curse fell in its full force and most comprehensive meaning ;—“ I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”* Satan was thus engaged, for his punishment, in a warfare, out of which he was to gather nothing but destruction : and who were his antagonists ? First the woman, who was not to die, as he no doubt supposed she would, immediately, but to be the mother of a Seed, with whom, secondly, he was to contend in mortal conflict ; whose heel he might indeed bruise, and thereby inflict upon him some injury, but who in return would bruise his head, strike at the very origin and mainspring of all his power to harm, and thus destroy him utterly as the promoter of evil in the world. This is the first prophecy in the Bible ; and all the subsequent prophecies and histories contained therein, lead and relate to its fulfilment. It is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who, born of the Virgin Mary, was peculiarly the Seed of the woman, and who, after many a conflict with Satan during his life, having endured a great fight of temptations, gained over him upon the cross a glorious victory, and will finally trample him under his feet, and put an end for ever to all his power of injuring

* Gen. iii. 15.

mankind. The same curse upon the serpent which showed us our enemy, showed us also our deliverer : it was to our first parents, and through them to us, at once a warning and a blessing ; it bade them not be ignorant of Satan's devices, and trust not in their own ability to withstand them, but in the God of peace and reconciliation, who, through his anointed Son taking upon him their nature, would hereafter bruise the enemy under the feet of his redeemed. Thus comforted and encouraged, both the woman and the man would hear their own sentences pronounced with a resigned and hopeful spirit—the woman, whose sorrow in bringing forth children was to be greatly multiplied, would yet rejoice in the reflection that one child so to be brought forth would bruise the serpent's head, and the thoughts of that future triumph would sustain the man under his weary labours, and though compelled to return to the dust from whence he sprang, he would feel sure that the death which was Satan's work, would be done away by Satan's overthrow. To him therefore Christ was held forth from the first as the resurrection and the life. And forasmuch as he saw plainly that death was brought about by sin, so would he be convinced that the abolition of death would be brought about by righteousness : that as, by the offence of one, judgment had come upon all unto condemnation, even so, by the righteousness of one, would the free and promised gift come upon all unto justification of life ; and in that conviction he "called his wife's name Eve, the mother of all living." Thus we see that the faith of Adam was fixed upon a righteous, and, because righteous, a victorious and ever-living Redeemer : as far as the revelation went, he was a believer in Christ. As we proceed, we shall have reason to believe that it was yet further revealed to him in what manner the redemption was to be effected ; and the occasion chosen for thus instructing

him was probably when the Lord God made unto him and unto his wife coats of skins, and clothed them. For this, in the opinion of many, as animals were not yet slain for food, was the first institution of sacrifice: and "if,"* says one of the ablest defenders of the doctrine of the atonement, "we admit that when God had ordained the deliverance of man, he had ordained the means: if we admit that Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; what memorial could be devised more apposite than that of animal sacrifice, exemplifying by the slaying of the victim the death which had been denounced against man's disobedience? Thus exhibiting the awful lesson of that death which was the wages of sin, and at the same time representing that death which was actually to be undergone by the Redeemer of mankind; and hereby connecting in one view the two great cardinal events in the history of man—the fall and the recovery—the death denounced against sin, and the death appointed for that Holy One, who was to lay down his life to deliver man from the consequences of sin; and the adoption of this rite, with sincere and pious feelings, would at the same time imply a humble sense of the unworthiness of the offerer, a confession that the death inflicted on the victim was the desert of those sins which had arisen from man's transgression, and a full reliance upon the promises of deliverance, joined to an acquiescence in the means appointed for its accomplishment." Life was in store for man, but hereafter he was to pass through death unto it: the mode at first instituted for preserving his existence, the tree of life, was no longer to be left within his reach. Endued therefore, as to his mind, with that knowledge of good and evil which would be needful in a world where the two are so intimately

* Archbishop Magee. Sermon II.

mingled, and, as to his body, clothed with garments calculated to protect him against the inclemency of the changing seasons, and the rough nature of his future labour among the thorns and briers which the earth now brought forth abundantly, according to the terms of its curse, he was driven out from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken : his return thither being prevented by certain angelic appearances called cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life. The earthly garden has long since disappeared, and the place thereof knoweth it no more ; but we, Christians, have a most sure promise of the immortality which it afforded, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whose words of comfort I will conclude this portion of my subject: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."*

CHAP. IV.

THE ANTEDILUVIAN PATRIARCHS.

UPON the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, we may suppose that the former was driven by the need of subsistence to undergo immediately that portion of the divine sentence which consisted in laborious tilling of the ground ; and we are assured that it was not long before the latter underwent her portion of it also, which consisted in the sorrows of childbirth. It seems, however, to have been with her as, according to the observation of our Lord, it has

* Rev. ii. 7.

been with the generality of her daughters, "as soon as she was delivered of the child, she remembered no more the anguish, for joy that a man was born into the world."* She considered her infant first-born, as what she named him, *Cain*, an acquisition or possession; and she acknowledged the giver of this, as of all other blessings, in her grateful exclamation, "I have gotten a man from the Lord."† Perhaps also she might fancy, that in this boy the divine promise was to be fulfilled, and that she clasped in her arms the seed of the woman, who was to bruise the serpent's head; ignorant how much of Satan's nature would hereafter show itself in this very child, how terrible an exhibition of the effects of prevalent sin would be presented in his actions. She bare afterwards another son, called Abel, and the brothers grew up together to youth and manhood. They were unlike, however, both in their dispositions and their pursuits. Cain was a tiller of the ground; Abel was a keeper of sheep: the works of Cain were evil,‡ and those of his brother were righteous. And therefore Cain hated Abel, and sought to be rid of him; he could not bear to have an example constantly before his eyes, showing him what he ought to be; he grudged him the very excellence that he would not strive to emulate. The malice and envy thus engendered in his disposition were at last let loose into decisive action, by the very different treatment which he and his brother experienced, upon a certain solemn occasion, when they both presented their offerings to the Lord. Cain brought his, "of the fruit of the ground;" Abel his, "of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof; and the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering," (perhaps by consuming it with fire from heaven,) "but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect."§ Three reasons

* John xvi. 21.
† 1 John iii. 12.

† Gen. iv. 1.
§ Gen. iv. 4.

may be given for this result. One, that the offering of Cain was less choice than that of Abel: it was merely a portion of the earth's produce, while that of his brother was the best of what he had to give—"the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof." Another, that Abel's offering being an animal sacrifice, and of divine appointment, was intended to commemorate the great future atonement—the "blood-shedding, without which there is no remission;"* while that of Cain was destitute of any such authority or meaning; upon which principle the apostle to the Hebrews has assured us, that "by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."† And this faith it was, which, by keeping him in a devout, and humble, and a grateful frame of mind, supplies a third reason for so different a reception of the brothers' offerings, namely, the difference of their own characters. It was with sacrifice as it is with prayer: "God heareth not sinners," who obstinately continue such, who attempt to impose upon their own hearts and upon him; but, "if any man be a sincere worshipper of him, and doeth his will, him he heareth."‡ And that this was no otherwise in the case of Cain, appears from what follows: "he was very wroth," and his gracious Lord condescended to reason with him upon his folly:§ "If thou doest well," he said, "shalt thou not be accepted?" that is, when thou wouldst come to God, come as thy brother does, with a mind as calm, as pure, as conscious of willing obedience as the infirmities of thy fallen nature will permit; "and if thou doest not well," as sometimes through those infirmities must be the case, "sin lieth at the door"—that is, a sin-offering, an animal sacrifice is ready at hand, to which, like thy brother, thou mayest betake thy-

* Heb. ix. 22.

† John ix. 30, 31.

‡ Heb. xi. 4.

§ Gen. iv. 5, 7.

self, with a faith fixed upon the atoning Lamb hereafter to be offered for the sins of the whole world. So thou wilt retain the privileges of the first-born ; thy brother will love and serve thee, and all will be well. But Cain resisted all this ; he was, mind and heart, " of the wicked one,"* and not of God ; his way led him neither to the obedience of the law, nor to the faith of the gospel ; hatred and envy raged within his breast ; and while he talked with his brother in the field, into which, according to the Greek translation, he persuaded him to go, he rose up against him and slew him. Thus the first introduction of death into the world presented it in its most horrible form ; a violent death, a deliberate murder, a murder of the innocent—a brother's murder. Eve now saw the whole train of consequences which followed her fatal fondness for the forbidden tree : lust had conceived, and brought forth sin ; and sin, being completed, had brought forth death. She had gotten a man from the Lord, and, O vanity of all human wishes ! that man had murdered his guiltless brother, and was banished from her sight and from the visible presence of his God for ever ! Still, however, she had faith in the promise, and that kept her from despair. After a while she bare a son, and called his name Seth, or appointed, " for God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew."† Let us not sink into despondency, however gloomy our earthly prospects may at times seem. Let us have faith in God ; he will not fail us, nor forsake us : hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ? Let Christians continue in faith, and charity, and holiness, with sobriety;‡ and as Eve was saved through childbearing from her desolate condition, so let them rest assured that God will make for them a

* 1 John iii. 12.

† Gen. iv. 25.

‡ 1 Tim. 11, 15. 1 Cor. x. 13.

way to escape out of every temptation; that they may be able to bear it. Let us now return to Cain, the murderer, whose fierce spirit was roused to such a pitch of moody desperation, that when God asked him, "Where is thy brother Abel?"* his answer was couched in terms of barefaced falsehood and defiance, "I know not: am I my brother's keeper?" How gentle, and yet how cutting to the conscience is the Lord's reply, "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground:" that is, it is useless to deny it; the commission of the murder is as well known to your Maker as if the very blood which you have shed had received a voice, and appealed for justice. Cain knew what that justice ought to be; he felt that he had forfeited his own existence, and his terrified imagination pictured to him his own violent end, in addition to the sentence which the Lord passed upon him. He was to be cursed from the earth, which should not yield to him her strength; he was to be driven from the neighbourhood of his parents, from the place of the presence of God; a fugitive and a vagabond he was to be in the earth; and besides all this, he said of himself to the Lord, "It shall come to pass that every one that findeth me shall slay me."† But this was not a part of the divine sentence upon him: against this, therefore, the Lord provided, by declaring, "Whoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken of him sevenfold;"‡ and by setting a mark upon him, lest any finding him should kill him. He caused him to live on, and to have descendants, so that it might be seen to what a pitch of depravity men would attain, when they deserted the good and right ways of God, and followed only their own vain imaginations, or the allurements of luxury and vice. Cain went out from

* Gen. iv. 9, 10. † Ver. 14. ‡ Ver. 15.

the presence of the Lord,* and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden, where he built the first city, and called it Enoch, after the name of his son. Irad, Mehujael, Methusael, and Lamech, were successively the patriarchs of his race : of the last-mentioned it is recorded that he had two wives, a practice not warranted by the early institution of marriage, though afterwards permitted, in some cases, to the chosen seed, and very generally adopted by the nations that know not God, among whom alone it is now retained. By these wives, Adah and Zillah, Lamech had three sons and a daughter : of these Jabal, the eldest, adopted and taught his descendants a wild and wandering life ; Jubal invented some of the most famous instruments of music ; and Tubal-cain was an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron. It is highly probable that under the names of Mars, Apollo, and Vulcan, these brethren were honoured by the Gentiles for many succeeding ages, and that many of the disgusting crimes ascribed by them to their gods may be traced to their origin in the family of Lamech, during that gloomy period when the earth was filled with violence, and was corrupt before God.† Lamech himself, in a speech addressed to his wives, appears to allude to some murders which he had committed, but in a manner so obscure, that we cannot hope to understand it, not knowing the facts to which it refers. We must now return to the descendants of Adam in the line of Seth, in the time of whose son Enos it is said that “men began to call upon the name of the Lord,”‡ or as it is translated in the margin, “to call themselves by the name of the Lord ;” that is, to call themselves the Lord’s people, or the sons of God, in opposition to the sons of men, or irreligious family of Cain. Of Caiman, Mahalaleel, and Jared, the succeeding patriarchs in the line of Seth, we have no parti-

* Gen. iv. 16. † Ibid. vi. 11. ‡ Ibid. iv. 26.

culars in Scripture ; but of Enoch, the son of Jared, the seventh from Adam, we have a highly interesting and astonishing, though brief account. " Enoch walked with God : and he was not ; for God took him."* Of the other patriarchs it is said that they died ; the expression, therefore, used concerning Enoch, differing from these, imports that though he left this earth, it was not according to the ordinary course of things, the common death of all men, but through an immediate act of God, removing him bodily from hence, to be for ever with his Lord. That this was the doctrine of the Jewish church, appears from a passage in the book of Ecclesiasticus, where it is said, " Enoch pleased the Lord, and was translated, being an example of repentance to all generations : "† and the same view of it is admitted by Christians also upon the authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews ;‡ in which we read, " by faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him ; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." From this we learn that the meaning of the expression to walk with God, is to please him, and without faith it is impossible to do this ; for " he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," a belief which in the days of Enoch was fast losing ground amongst mankind. We know also from the writings of St. Jude, that Enoch uttered a prophecy against those who should thus deny the only God, and their promised Saviour,§ saying, " Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds that they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches,

* Gen. v. 24.

† Heb. xi. 5, 6.

‡ Eccles. xlv. 16.

§ Jude 4, 14, 15.

which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." This prophecy was partly verified at the time of the deluge, partly in the overthrow of the Jewish state, but will have its full completion in the latter days. Adam had died, at the age of nine hundred and thirty years, not long before the translation of Enoch; but all the other intermediate patriarchs, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, and Jared, were alive when that miraculous event took place: and his son Methusalah, as if to compensate for the brief abiding of his father upon earth, survived him for the unusually long period of six hundred and sixty-nine years,* being nine hundred and sixty-nine years of age when he died, which is the longest duration of life recorded in the Bible, and farther remarkable in that, in consequence of it, he outlived by five years his own son Lamech. Lamech, the father of Noah, was born before the death of Adam; so that these three patriarchs form a connecting link between the creation and the flood which took place in the days of Noah, and which two periods were divided by an interval of one thousand six hundred and fifty-six years, according to the shortest computation. When Noah was born to Lamech, his father gave him the name he bears, signifying "comfort or rest," because he said,† "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." It may be that in thus expressing himself, he manifested his expectation of the promised Seed, whose victory over Satan would be followed by a remission of the curse which then afflicted the earth: or else, that being gifted by the Holy Spirit with a knowledge of future events, he foresaw that the arts of agriculture would not perish altogether in the deluge which overwhelmed its works, but would be preserved and

* Gen. v. 27.

† Ver. 29.

augmented by Noah, from whom they have been handed down to his posterity, that is, to all the nations of the earth. In proportion as these arts are improved, mankind is fed more abundantly, and at a less expense of manual labour; and being thus set free to turn their attention to procuring the other necessities and comforts of life, they rise to the habitual enjoyment of such temporal good things as God has vouchsafed to place within the reach of his creatures, as the rewards of ingenuity and perseverance; and thus even out of the very curse imposed upon the earth are derived materials for a blessing. And worldly gain will become spiritual also to us, if we never forget to honour the Lord with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase;* if godliness and contentment be the principles on which we act. Following the examples of Abel and of Enoch, let what we do be done in faith, in reliance upon the fulfilled promise of a Saviour, in reference to the declared approval of our Father in heaven. And if the days of God's faithful servants are sometimes shortened here, if they are early called away from this world and its cares, let them reflect that thus it was also with those two righteous men, who received the most decisive testimony that they pleased God, however much it seemed good to him to diminish the time of their sojourning on earth; being assured that length of days alone is no proof of God's favour; and that better is a wise child, brought up in the way that he should go, than an old and foolish man, who will no more be admonished.

• Prov. iii. 9.

CHAP. V.

THE DELUGE.

AS God, for the relief and comfort of his creatures, has mercifully ordained that good, both temporal and spiritual, should be capable of being derived out of temporal evil, so likewise, with a view to their warning and humiliation, has he made it manifest, that even the choicest of his worldly gifts may be abused and misapplied, becoming thereby abundant sources of misfortune and of misery. Adam had cause to acknowledge this latter truth, when he found that the wife of his bosom, the woman whom God had given to be with him as a helpmate and beloved companion, became the occasion of his fall: and when we proceed to the history of his descendants who were overwhelmed by a flood, we shall perceive that a great portion of their calamity may be traced to a similar origin. "When men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, it came to pass that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair, and they took them wives of all that they chose. And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years."* It was this ill-advised union between the hitherto separate races of Seth and Cain, expressed by the titles, the sons of God and the daughters of men, that (to speak according to the language of human infirmity) seems to have wearied out the patience of the Almighty. It had seemed good to those who called themselves his sons

* Gen. vi. 1—3.

to join together that which he had put asunder, and the result speedily was, that the yielding to one temptation laid them open to the inroads of every other—that the spirit became subdued to the flesh, and carnal parents begat carnal children, whose might was abused to lawless violence, whose renown was in corruption, whose glory was in their shame. Let us not then think, that being the sons of God in name will be enough for us, unless we are in heart his children. Observe how they so called in the old time fell into the snare of fleshly seductions, and pray that the Spirit of God may not have to strive with you as it had with them, or that striving it may subdue you, and bring your vain and wandering imaginations into the obedience of faith and love. In the midst of that deeply-rooted and wide-spreading wickedness which then prevailed in the world, you will find one object of imitation, one heart which was right with God. Noah, the son of Lamech, “was a just man, and perfect in his generations—and Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”* The worship and fear of God became at length contracted within the limits of his single family: and that family alone, consisting of seven persons, his wife, his three sons and their wives, were destined to be preserved from that terrible destruction which the Lord prepared to bring upon the earth. The fatal blow was not, however, struck without due warning given of the Lord’s purpose to his rebellious creatures. An hundred and twenty years before it happened did God reveal the coming of the flood to Noah, and during all that time did his long-suffering wait, while the patriarch vainly preached † righteousness to the obstinate and unbelieving generation with whom he had to do. The

* Gen. vi. 8, 9

† 2 Pet. ii. 5.

righteousness which he preached was that of which, according to the apostle to the Hebrews, he himself was an inheritor;* it was the righteousness that is by faith. The revelation received by him from God was twofold—it assured him, first, that a general destruction was impending over the whole race of mankind; and, secondly, that amid the ruin a small remnant of such believers would be left as should by faith embrace the promise of a Messiah to come, and live after a manner conformable to that pious expectation. That such was the character of Noah's preaching we may conclude from that which St. Peter, in his first Epistle, has said concerning it;† he tells us that it was not so much Noah as Christ himself who preached by his Spirit to the disobedient of that day, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by passing through the water: the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us. From this passage we may perceive the propriety of the expressions used in our ministration of baptism, where we pray that the child being delivered from God's wrath, may be received into the ark of Christ's church; and being steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that he may finally come to the land of everlasting life. We may learn also from it not to limit the preaching of Christ to that which he actually uttered with his own lips while upon earth, but to extend it to the declarations of his prophets in the Old Testament, as well as of his apostles in the New. For "holy men of God spake in the old time as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"‡—"and that spirit which was in them was the Spirit of Christ."§ When Noah, thus inspired and directed,

* Heb. xi. 7.

† 1 Pet. iii. 18—21.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 21.

§ 1 Pet. i. 11.

had for a long time preached in vain to the careless infidels among whom he lived, and had completed, according to the instructions of the Most High, the ark which was destined to be the safe refuge of him and his ; seven days before the breaking forth of the great flood of waters, he was commanded to bring into it a specified proportion of clean and unclean animals, together with food for their subsistence, and finally to enter it himself, accompanied by his immediate family, and to await the result with confidence in God. The fate of those who had despised his warnings may be briefly related in our Saviour's words: "They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."* The manner in which it took place is thus related—"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights."† The opening of the windows of heaven expresses here the vast masses, or, as it were, cataracts of water which came down from the sky ; while the fountains of the great deep being broken up, seems to imply, either that by some convulsion of nature immense quantities of the same fluid were forced up out of the interior of the earth, or else that a change was effected in the level of the ocean, so as to discharge its waters upon the land. In either case the destruction of all that breathed would be equally produced. As the waters prevailed, and increased greatly upon the earth, they bare up the ark, which floated upon their surface, passing over the summits of the highest hills,

* Luke xvii. 27.

† Gen. vii. 11, 12.

covered as they then were to the depth of fifteen cubits, or rather more than two-and-twenty feet. For a hundred and fifty days this state of things continued without variation: the little remnant of mankind remained shut up in their dreary confinement, cheered only amid the universal desolation by the thought that they were remembered and watched over by that Almighty Being who had brought it upon the world. The cessation of the rain from heaven, the drying wind which God caused to blow, and the consequent diminution of the waters, would all tend to nourish and keep alive in their hearts this confidence in him—till, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, being five months from the commencement of the flood, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat, doubtless upon the highest peak, for it was not till the first day of the tenth month that the waters had so far subsided as to suffer the tops of the mountains to be seen. Noah waited after this forty days, and then sent forth a raven, which, however, brought him back no intimation of the condition of the earth: his next messenger was a dove, whose first excursion was equally fruitless, but which, when dismissed a second time, brought back a sprig of olive in her mouth, a circumstance which proved the increasing dryness of the earth, and caused the olive to be esteemed in after ages as an emblem of reconciliation and peace. In seven days' time the dove was again sent out upon a third flight, and returned no more, being now able to provide for her own subsistence. Another month elapsed, and then on the first day of the new year, and of the month which we call September, "Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry."* That is, it was cleared of water, though, probably, still in a

* Gen. viii. 13.

wet and swampy condition, unfit for the habitation of man: so that it was not until the seven-and-twentieth day of the second month, that Noah and his family, and the living creatures which were with him, came forth by God's command out of the ark, in which they had been confined a year and ten days. He was grateful for that great mercy, and his first occupation after quitting the ark was to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Author of his preservation. It was a sacrifice well-pleasing unto the Lord, and as its sweet savour rose to heaven, He who abode there condescended to express his purposes of mercy, which he had in store for the rescued generation of mankind. He gave them, first, the blessing of fertility—"be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth;"* the blessing of authority over the brute creation—"into your hand are they delivered;"† the blessing of increased means of subsistence—"every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you, even as the green herb have I given you all things: but flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat."‡ And if the life of the beast was to be thus respected, much more the life of man: much more were they to be cautious in abstaining from shedding his blood, whom God had made in his own image, and whose violent death he pledged himself to punish. "Surely your blood of your lives will I require: at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man."§ The first prohibition here recited was repeated to the Jewish nation in the Law of Moses, and appears to have been continued with respect to Christians also by the council of apostles and elders assembled at Jerusalem, though how far this latter decree was intended to be either universally or perpetually binding, has been made matter of

* Gen. ix. 1.
 † Verses 3, 4

‡ Ver. 2.
 § Ver. 5.

question. It is violated manifestly at this day by the savage cannibal, who, having long lost sight of it devours his fellow man; by the half-civilized Abyssinian, whose practice it is to feed on flesh cut from the living animal; and perhaps is too little thought of by some among ourselves, when we indulge in either luxurious or cruel gratifications at the expense of the brute creation, which it seems to have been partly the intention of this commandment to repress. And as to the second, or repetition of the original law against murder, which seems here to be introduced as enforcing the former, by reference to a known law existing from the first, accompanied by a more express declaration of its penalty: this also is but too often violated by the so-called civilized and christian man, who, for the sake of some miserable gain, for the gratification of some wicked malice, for the satisfaction of some fancied demand of honour, lifts up his hand to slay his neighbour. Thus is the earth again filled with violence, and herein do many rest their title to be thought men of renown: the imagination of man's heart continues evil from his youth, as in the time before the deluge; and "as it was in the days of Noah, even so shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." But though destruction will come upon the earth in God's own time, in that awful day of which the very angels in heaven are ignorant, yet it will not come in the same manner. "The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word of God which first created them, are kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men." * That a flood of waters like the first shall never again overwhelm the earth, was the solemn covenant of God to Noah, and formed the conclusion of his blessing.

* 2 Pet. iii. 6, 7.

As a token of that covenant to all future generations, God gave the rainbow; that brilliant and many-coloured arch, formed by the passage of the sun's light through drops of rain, of which the son of Sirach speaks in such high terms of merited admiration. "Look upon the rainbow," he says, "and praise Him that made it: very beautiful it is in the brightness thereof: it compasseth the heaven about with a glorious circle, and the hands of the Most High have bended it."* The rainbow exists only when rain falls in drops; and if that opening of the windows of heaven which caused the flood let fall the waters not in drops, but in one continuous sheet, or torrent, every appearance of the rainbow becomes a natural token that the rain which it accompanies is different from the rain of the deluge, and need not therefore be expected to produce its destructive effects. This security from perishing by water, which God has thus promised and ratified by a conspicuous token to the world at large, he has transferred in a spiritual sense to his afflicted Church, to which he has given a solemn promise by his prophet Isaiah, that in like manner he will preserve her from all such evils as might, without his ever-watchful providence, swallow up and overwhelm her. "For this," he says, "is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee."† And we may remark, also, that as he hath transferred the covenant to this spiritual object, so also hath he its token; assuming the rainbow both in the prophetic and Christian visions to

* Eccles. xliii. 11, 12.

† Isaiah liv. 9, 10.

denote his glory. Ezekiel and St. John saw it alike, encircling the heavenly throne, and Him that sat upon it: "as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."* "There was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."† The emblem of God's glory, is the emblem also of his mercy. While the earth remaineth, he grants unto us the seed-time of grace, and allows the harvest of repentance: may we, through faith and love, such as his Spirit breathes into the soul, embrace his offered favour, and clinging to the refuge which Christ's church affords us, be found at the last day righteous through his righteousness, and ascribing our salvation to the long-suffering of the Lord!

CHAP. VI.

THE DISPERSION.]

WHEN the surface of the earth, having become dry after the wasting deluge, was again fitted for the habitation of men, it is evident that nothing could be more desirable for their temporal well-being than the rapid increase of their numbers. With a boundless extent of fertile land before them, every child born in the family of Noah became a direct accession to the means of rendering it productive: the necessity of that prudential forethought was then unknown, which in the present day operates as a discouragement to early marriage, making it impera-

* Ezek. i. 28.

† Rev. iv. 3.

tive upon every man to consider well before he enters into that state, in what manner he is likely to be able to bring up a family, and to provide for it in after-life. The sons of Noah were not required to entertain any such anxious misgivings as to the future condition of their children; acting under a direct command* of God, secured by his promise of preservation from another deluge, they became respectively the heads of those vast families, by whom the nations were divided in the earth after the flood. Noah himself set them an example of industry, wherefrom they might learn the use to which they might put their still increasing numbers: he began to be a husbandman, and they doubtless all of them, at least in the first instance, attached themselves to the same pursuit.† They ate and drank, and enjoyed the good of their labour: the profit of the earth was for them all: they were comforted‡ concerning their work and the toil of their hands, because of the ground which the Lord had cursed. Such was the general effect of God's blessing upon them—it tended to promote the wise designs of his providence, and their own temporal welfare; it did not, however, affect their dispositions, or secure them against the temptations to which the flesh is liable. Even in these primitive patriarchs we find manifest signs of imperfection—we see no pattern that we can follow throughout, till in the fulness of time One came among us who did no sin, leaving us a complete example of every excellence, that we should follow his steps through grace here, and be like him hereafter in his kingdom in heaven. Among the improvements in cultivation which Noah undertook was the planting of a vineyard, and the making wine of its grapes:—wine, which, used in moderation, maketh glad the heart of man, giving

* Gen. ix. 1.

† Eccles. iii. 13; v. 9.

‡ Gen. v. 29.

him strength of body and elevation of mind ; but which as surely, if indulged in to excess, clouds his brain, and deadens his faculties, and renders him weaker than a child—a pitiable, contemptible, brutish object, lost to all exercise of reason and all sense of decency, as Noah found, who drank of it in this manner and was drunken,* and was uncovered within his tent. Hitherto we have looked on this distinguished patriarch as an object of the highest respect and reverence ; alas ! how fallen do we find him now ; how low does he lie, exposed to the derision of his own child ! “ Ham, the father of Canaan,”† (informed probably by his son, who had first discovered it,) “ saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without,” taking, as it should seem, a wicked pleasure in thus making as public as possible his father’s shame. But Shem and Japheth, the other two sons of Noah, had a better sense of duty implanted in their breasts. They hastened, not to look upon the revolting scene, but to conceal it from the eyes of others : “ they took a garment and went backward, and covered their father ; and Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son,” (that is, probably, his grandson, who was the first witness of his exposure,) “ had done unto him :” and, with returning reason, the spirit of prophecy came upon his soul, and he looked forward into future ages, and foretold the fate of his descendants, with reference to their conduct on that day. “ Cursed be Canaan ; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. Blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant : God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem : and Canaan shall be his servant.” The fulfilment of this prophecy will be more clearly seen, when we look at

* Gen. ix. 21.

† Gen. ix. 22—27.

the different nations which descended from the persons here mentioned, in which, not in the individuals themselves, it appears to have had its completion. Why Ham, who seems to have been the principal offender, is passed over in silence, cannot certainly be known. The conjecture seems highly probable, that Canaan in the first instance discovered Noah's condition, and perhaps seduced his father to treat him as he did : and if Canaan was Ham's favourite child, he might possibly be sufficiently punished by the knowledge of the future degradation denounced against this portion of his race. For men, who, as in those times, looked for the future Deliverer of mankind to arise each out of his own family, felt any thing calculated to affect the fortunes of that family much more acutely than it is possible for us to feel at the present day ; and as they could not suppose it likely that he would arise out of a race, like Canaan's, devoted to servitude, the curse would prove a bitter mortification to Ham, as well as to his son. For some time after this event, however, the families of the three brethren remained undivided in the neighbourhood of their common ancestor ; nor was it until after his death, and those of his three immediate children, that any inclination for a change of place appears to have possessed their minds. Then, it seems, they left the mountainous regions in which they had at first been settled, and travelled till they found a place in the land of Shinar, the appearance of which, it being of a most rich and fertile description, tempted them to fix their habitation within it. I am aware that, according to the dates of the lives of the patriarchs found in our present copies of the Hebrew Bible, this event must have happened long before the death of Noah, and still longer before that of Shem his son, who was living so late as the time of Abraham. A great majority, however, of the

learned persons who have studied the subject, have, in this instance, given the preference to that system of dates which is to be found in the ancient Greek translation, and which places the birth of Peleg, when the earth is said to have been divided, a hundred and eighty-one years after the death of Noah, and twenty-nine after that of Shem. Neither is it without the sanction of Holy Writ, for Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the years of whose life it mentions, and who is not found in the Hebrew copies, has been admitted by St. Luke* into his genealogy of Christ. I shall therefore not hesitate to follow it, in supposing that Noah had slept with his fathers before this great migration of his descendants; who would hardly have ventured in the lifetime of that patriarch to have set about so foolish and impious a design, as that of building a tower in the plain of Shinar, whose top should reach unto heaven. The plan in all probability originated with Nimrod, the son of Cush, whose daring genius appears to have acquired him an ascendancy over the families of Shem and Japheth: he began to be a mighty one in the earth, and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, in the land of Shinar. His object being an absolute dominion over all the sons of Noah, who were then occupying that land, would of course have been frustrated by their dispersion; and therefore the proposal to build a city and a tower, and to make them a name, lest they should be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth, was an artful device to retain them under his power. But what are the most ingenious contrivances of men, when they oppose themselves to the purposes of God? they are all vanity—mere “wind and confusion.”† The Most High determined to separate the sons of Adam,‡ and to divide to the

* Luke iii. 36.

† Isaiah xli. 29.

‡ Deut. xxxii. 8.

nations their inheritance ; and to effect this, he interposed in a miraculous manner, by putting an end to that which constituted the strongest bond of their union—their sameness of speech. “ Behold, said the Lord, the people is one, and they have all one language ; and this they begin to do : and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us now go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”* It is not from these words to be inferred that every individual spoke a distinct language, so as not to be understood by his neighbour, but simply that such a discordance of speech was introduced among them, as was sufficient to bring to pass the design of the Almighty, which was to cause their separation, and as a consequence of that, the cessation of the work in which they were engaged. From hence the city, left them incomplete, though finished afterwards upon a less ambitious scale, derived its name of Babel, or confusion,† “ because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.” A variety of conjectures, for we can hardly call them more, have been produced as to the number of languages then begun to be spoken : some have estimated them at seventy-two, corresponding to the families mentioned by Moses ; others at sixteen, corresponding to the nations ; while the opinion which seems to rest less upon fancy, and more upon actual investigation than the other, fixes them at three, namely, the Sanscrit, Arabic, and Tartarian. But whether this threefold division applies properly to the languages of men or not, it certainly does so to the races from which they sprang. Among the three families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, sons of Noah, the whole earth was divided. The posterity of Japheth,

* Gen. xi. 6, 7.

† Ver. 9.

who, though named last, was the eldest, took possession of "the isles of the Gentiles,"* by which was probably meant the more remote regions of the earth, whether in an easterly or westerly direction, embracing Europe at one extremity, and India at the other. The posterity of Ham extended themselves over Arabia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, the greater part of Africa, and that land called the land of Canaan, afterwards the scene of so many wonderful events recorded in the Bible. The posterity of Shem, the youngest son, occupied, it would seem, the smallest extent of territory, being divided into two principal branches, under Peleg and Joktan, the former settling in Chaldea, the latter in Arabia, on the coasts of the Persian Gulf. But however less amply endowed with territorial possessions the line of Shem might be, in one point it had a notable advantage over those of his brethren—the worship of the true Jehovah, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, was continued in it, when the rest of the world were given over to the most base idolatries; and it was honoured by giving birth, according to the flesh, to the promised Seed of the woman, the Vanquisher of Satan, the Redeemer of mankind. "Blessed," said Noah in his prophecy, "be the Lord God of Shem." Nor was the race of Japheth, though not thus privileged in the first instance, to be without their share of the blessing in the latter days: "God shall persuade (or enlarge) Japheth," said the prophet, "and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem;" a declaration evidently made good by the coming in of so many heathen and barbarous nations from various quarters of the globe, to worship in that spiritual Jerusalem, of which the Church of Christ is the representative upon earth—the spiritual tabernacle of Shem, which, according to the prophet

* Gen. x. 5.

Isaiah,* was to be enlarged for the reception of the Gentiles. The curse of Canaan was, to be in servitude to both his brethren, which, as to Shem, was brought upon the Canaanites when they were subdued by the children of Israel under Joshua, and the succeeding rulers of that people ; and as to Japheth, when those of them who fled from before the sword of Joshua, and settled on the northern shores of Africa, were subjugated by the Roman power. Henceforward the nations springing from Ham and Japheth, will be only mentioned incidentally, so far as they were connected with, or had influence upon the fortunes of the family of Shem, and especially of that part of it which descended from him through Eber and Peleg, at the time of whose birth took place the dispersion from Babel. This patriarch, it appears, or possibly his son Nahor, departed in an easterly direction, and dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees—a place, as its name denotes, in which the deluded inhabitants, again forgetting the God of Noah, became worshippers of fire, besides, as it is probable, giving way to other temptations of idolatry ; for thus did Joshua afterwards speak to the Israelites, as of a well-known thing : “ Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood (the river Euphrates) in old time, and they served other gods.”† Terah, the father of Abraham, and son of Nahor, is expressed by name, as having yielded to defile himself with these abominations ; and thus we see that even in the chosen family there was a period of darkness, in which it would seem that the name and dignity of the Highest was almost forgotten upon the earth. In the following chapter, I shall endeavour to show that it was still held in remembrance in another quarter, and served to sustain a righteous man under the pressure of most sore afflictions.

* Isaiah liv. 2.

† Josh. xxiv. 2.

CHAP. VII.

THE HISTORY OF JOB.

"THERE WAS A MAN IN THE LAND OF UZ, WHOSE NAME WAS JOB:
AND THAT MAN WAS PERFECT AND UPRIGHT, AND ONE THAT
FEARED GOD, AND ESCHewed EVIL."*

THE time when the celebrated personage lived, of whom this excellent character is given, has always been a subject of much difference of opinion among those who have attempted to arrange the events recorded in Scripture in the proper order of their occurrence. In bringing forward his history before that of Abraham, I am influenced by the following considerations.† There are in it no allusions to the history of Abraham, or of any of his descendants: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, an event which would have afforded so decided an argument in the debates between Job and his friends, is passed over without notice. The customs mentioned in it are those of very early times: the worship of the sun and moon is the only idolatry alluded to, and the practice of Job in offering sacrifice in behalf of his children, seems to point to a period when as yet no regular priesthood was established. The great age of Job, who lived a hundred and forty years after his trial, and speaks of himself as then an elderly man, carries us back to a remote period of the patriarchal times. And therefore it seems not improbable that when idolatry was beginning to extend itself over the earth, among the nations dispersed from Babel, and had

* Job i. 1.

† See these reasons more fully stated in Townsend's Arrangement of the Old Testament, vol. i. p. 28; a work of which I have frequently availed myself in the course of these Lectures. Mr. Townsend has taken them from Dr. Hales.

even, as it appears, infected the chosen family of the line of Shem, God did not even for that temporary interval leave himself without a witness, but raised up the righteous and patient Job, to testify his trust in the providence, and his faith in the promises, of his Creator.* He appears to have been a prince or chieftain in his own country; not only enjoying his rank and power for the purposes of mere gratification, but, according to the character given of him in the text, applying them to the uses of practical benevolence. "Thou hast instructed many," said his friend to him, "and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees." Of himself he says, compelled to vindicate his character from the insinuations and reproaches of his false comforters, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth."† — "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor?"‡ — "Did I despise the cause of my man-servant or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me?"§ — "I rejoiced not at the destruction of him that hated me, nor lifted up myself when evil found him, neither did I suffer my mouth to sin, by wishing a curse to his soul."|| He was hospitable: "The stranger did not lodge in the street," he says; "I opened my doors to the

* Whenever he lived, "there was none like him on the earth." Ch. i. 8. St. Augustine remarks this, in his treatise on the Deserts and Remission of Sins, b. ii. ch. 12.

† Job xxix. 11—17.

§ Ibid. xxxi. 13.

‡ Ibid. xxx. 25.

|| Verses 29, 30.

traveller.”* And his large possessions which he thus nobly used, had been acquired by no injustice, “If my land cry against me, or that the furrows likewise thereof complain; if I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life; let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley.”† Thus did this exemplary man perform his duties towards his neighbour. He kept watch also over the purity of his soul, observing a strict rule of continence and chastity:—“I have made a covenant with mine eyes,” said he; “why then should I think upon a maid?”‡ His heart was “not deceived by a woman”—he knew that the sin which arises out of such a seduction was a heinous crime; “yea, an iniquity to be punished by the judges.”§ The great principle upon which he rested in the conduct of his life and conversation, was the fear and worship of God alone. He firmly refused to give in to the then prevailing adoration of the heavenly bodies, by which deluded mortals were led away to serve the creatures rather than the Creator. “If I beheld,” says Job, “the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand,” in token of adoration; “this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge; for I should have denied the God that was above.”|| Such was the behaviour of this just, temperate, and pious man in the days of his youth, when the “secret of God was upon his tabernacle;” when “the Almighty was yet with him, and his children were about him;” over whom he watched, as we learn from the sacrifices which he was wont to offer up for them, with the most tender and the most thoughtful parental solicitude; “when he sat chief, and dwelt as a king in the army, as one that

* Job xxxi. 32.

† Verses 38—40.

‡ Ver. 1.

§ Verses 9, 11.

|| Verses 26—28.

comforteth the mourners.”* We are next invited to look upon him under a great change of fortune and condition: to see him tried by such a variety of afflictions as scarcely ever fell to the lot of man; and to derive a lesson from the great patience which sustained him under them so long, although at the last it in some sort gave way, and he spake unadvisedly with his lips. We are told that there was a day when the sons of God, or created angels, came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan, the adversary of mankind, the spirit who tempted Eve, came also among them. The Lord demanded of Satan whether he had observed the righteousness of Job; and Satan in reply, while he acknowledged it, attributed it to his prosperity, and declared that the two would come to an end together. God permitted him to make trial of this, reserving only the person of Job from the attacks of his enemy. Satan accordingly proceeded to the work by means of temporal calamities. The Sabceans fell upon his oxen and asses, and took them away, and slew his servants; the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed his flocks; the Chaldeans made out three bands, and carried away his camels; and, heaviest blow of all to a fond father, while his sons and daughters were feasting together, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they died. Plundered on all sides, bereft of his beloved children, what did Job? He mourned and lamented, but it was with a godly sorrow. He rent his mantle and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”† Thus was Satan foiled in his first attempt—

* Job xxix. 4, 5, 25.

† Ibid. i. 21.

a beautiful example of pious resignation was given to mankind—"and in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."* How often, did we reflect upon these words of Job, would they not put us to shame, when we complain and murmur, and are out of temper at some trifling loss, some little inconvenience which has befallen us, something which has not turned out exactly as we wish it. It is to these expressions of dissatisfaction, to these outbreaks of discontent and anger, that the enemy of our souls delights to bring us—he still walketh about to and fro upon the earth, seeking whom he may devour; and the man of hasty temper and the murmurer is foremost always to throw himself into the very path of the destroyer. Again Satan stood before the Lord, and, owning that he had as yet made no impression upon Job's constancy, alleged as a reason for it, that he had not been allowed to do any injury to his person. This also he was now permitted to do, to any extent short of taking away his life. He smote Job, therefore, with a loathsome and painful disease, of which, in various parts of his subsequent discourses, the afflicted man has left us a terrible description; and while in this condition, he had the additional anguish of hearing her who should have been his best earthly comforter, the wife of his bosom, endeavour to exasperate him to an act of rebellion against God. "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die."† "But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."‡ An event now happened which might have been of service to him, though in effect it turned out far otherwise: he was visited by three of his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, who came in order to

* Job i. 22.

† Ibid. ii. 9.

‡ Ver. 10.

mourn with him, and to comfort him. The first of these indeed they did : "they lifted up their voice and wept. And they rent every one his mantle, and scattered dust upon their heads towards heaven."* But as to comfort or encouragement they uttered none : "seven days they sat with him upon the ground, and none spake a word unto him." At the end of that time he burst forth in a strain of mournful complaint, wishing that he had never been born, and praying for death. This, although betraying some weakness, might in the eyes of a friend have appeared excusable under the circumstances of his cruel case ; but Eliphaz straightway reproved him for it with severity, and instead of condoling with him, and pitying the miseries which had put him into this agony, bluntly rebuked him for not following the good advice that he used to give others in their adversity, and told him he had reason to suspect his piety, because the innocent were not wont to suffer such things, but only wicked oppressors, whom though never so mighty, God always humbled ; exhorting him to repentance, as the surest way to find mercy from God. But Job, displeased at this, endeavoured to defend the justice of his complaint, and when he had ended, the same argument was taken up by Bildad, and in still harsher terms by Zophar, to each of whom, becoming irritated more and more, he replied with proportionable severity and vehemence. What they desired to impress upon him was, that he must look to his own wickedness as the cause of his calamity, for that this was the invariable rule upon which God acted in his providential government of the world ; while he denied that such was the rule, or at least maintained that his own case constituted an exception to it ; and thus, although he had the best of the argument, his mode of handling it led him insen-

* Job ii. 12, 13.

sibly towards a blamable self-righteousness, and a desire to justify himself rather than God. On this account it was, that when the three friends of Job had ended their uncharitable remarks, being silenced, but not convinced, a young man named Elihu, who was present at the conference, stood up, and with an honest frankness expressed his opinion that both parties were in the wrong; and then, especially addressing himself to Job, maintained in impressive language the righteousness of God, showing that it was not because we did not understand the depth of all his counsels that we should presume to murmur against them; or think ourselves unfairly treated, whatever may befall us in this changeful world, or whatever may be our merits in our own conceit. And to conclude all, God himself took up the controversy, and speaking to Job out of the whirlwind, convinced him of his ignorance and weakness, by an enumeration of some of the wondrous works of his creation, none of which could man pretend to understand, and should feel it therefore his duty rather to submit himself with meekness under the mighty hand of God, than cavil or complain of his proceedings.* Then Job returned to his former and better mind, confessing his inability to understand the deep things

* I do not dwell upon the poetical beauties, or the rich treasures of natural science which the book of Job presents to us, esteeming them subjects foreign to the purpose of these Lectures, which is rather to exhibit and remark upon historical facts: its perusal, however, with a special view to those characteristics, will amply repay the attentive reader, as has been forcibly remarked, with reference to the latter, by Lord Bacon, who calls it—"that excellent book of Job, which if it be revolved with diligence, will be found pregnant and swelling with natural philosophy, &c. &c."—*Advancement of Learning*, vol. ii. p. 57 of Basil Montague's Edition.

Sir Richard Steele has a paper in the *Guardian*, No. 36, in which he compares "the war-horse" in Job with similar descriptions in the Greek and Latin poets, and pronounces it "transcendantly above them."

of God, and humbly thanking him for his instruction in those matters which it was fitting for him to know. His confession and repentance was accepted for himself, and his intercession also for his three friends, against whom God's wrath was kindled, because they had not spoken of him the things that were right. Job having thus been tried in the furnace of affliction, as acceptable men for the most part are, was again restored to wealth and comfort ; a new family arose around him, his latter end was blest more than the beginning, and he died at a good old age, comforted no doubt in his last moments by that joyful reflection upon a resurrection to come, which had sustained him in the time of his sore calamity. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another ; though my reins be consumed within me."* May all the children of God encourage themselves with the same hope, in the midst of affliction and at the hour of death ; and these words of Job raise their minds to a firm expectation of the life to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord !

CHAP. VIII.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM.

IN the prophecy of Noah, Shem appeared to be clearly pointed out as the person in whose lineage the worship of the true God should be chiefly perpetuated, and in which, therefore, the promised Seed of

* Job xix. 25—27.

the woman was hereafter to arise. But Shem had five sons; and their families, after the division of the nations at Babel, became variously dispersed, and separated from each other; while in most of them the remembrance of the God of their fathers became less and less strong in every succeeding generation; and in spite of the evident demonstrations of his power exhibited in the destruction of mankind by the flood, and in the subsequent confusion of tongues, the worship of the creatures began by degrees to gain ground over that of the Creator, God blessed for ever. In order to supply, to a certain extent, a remedy to this disease of the soul, and to carry on more manifestly his gracious purpose of ultimate deliverance for the whole human race from the bondage of sin and Satan, it seemed good to Him to make choice of an individual of the race of Shem, descending through his third son, Arphaxad, namely, Abram, the son of Terah, then dwelling with his father in Ur of the Chaldees, to whom he would reveal himself in a more special manner, and communicate a variety of spiritual promises, embracing the assurance that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be hereafter blessed. The first revelation, as St. Stephen assures us in the seventh chapter of the Acts,* was made to him while he was in Mesopotamia, that is at Ur, before he dwelt in Haran. It was a direction to quit his country, his kindred, and if need were, his father's family, and to go unto a land which God would show him, accompanied by a promise of great blessings, as the consequence of his compliance. Abram, like St. Paul on a somewhat similar occasion, was "not disobedient to the heavenly vision:"† he set off, trusting to the guidance of heaven, and induced his father Terah, his wife Sarai, and his

* Acts vii. 2.

† Ibid. xxvi. 19.

nephew Lot, to accompany him on his journey. When they arrived at Haran, owing perhaps to the increasing infirmities of Terah, they tarried there some time; and it was not until after his father's death, that Abram, being then seventy-five years old, renewed his progress westward, and entered the land of Canaan. He entered it towards its northern frontier, and having remained for a short time in an encampment between Bethel and Ai, where the Lord made him a specific promise, that to his seed he would give that land, and where he built an altar, and offered his devotions to him, he proceeded onward to the south; and finding the country in a state of famine, was induced to visit Egypt. Perceiving himself there in the power of the king of that country, and fearing that the beauty of Sarai, if she was known to be his wife, would excite the Egyptian to put him to death, in order to obtain her, he desired her to call herself his sister; the consequence of which was, that Pharaoh sent and conveyed her to his palace, with the intention of making her his wife; "and entreated Abram well for her sake."* But the righteous Lord would not sanction either this arbitrary seizure on the one hand, or this cowardly equivocation on the other. He punished Pharaoh in such a manner as to make him restore Sarai to her lawful husband, with a just reproof for his disingenuous conduct, and to send him away in the undisturbed enjoyment of the goods he had acquired, insomuch that he was now very "rich in cattle, and silver and gold." "If this conduct of Abram was weakness and defect in faith—as who is perfect and sinneth not?—let it teach us to fear for ourselves; to watch and pray, lest we also enter into temptation. And if at any time, through frailty of

* Gen. xii. 16.

the flesh, we happen to fall, let it also be an encouragement to us, that we shall not perhaps be cast away ; that God is gracious, and may overlook our infirmities."* Uniform consistency of character was a blessing to which Abram had yet attained. His faith in the first instance had been of the most remarkable nature—"by it, when he was called to go out into a place which he should hereafter receive for an inheritance, he obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went;"† but though it thus enabled him to despise his present comforts, to expose himself to a variety of difficulties and hardships, for the promise of God, yet it was not enough, as we have seen, to make him look the danger of death steadily in the face, and preserve his integrity at the hazard of his life. He might possibly have thought, that having quitted the land promised as his inheritance, and gone down into Egypt, he could not claim the Lord's protection there, and on that account had recourse to the devices of human craftiness ; but however this may be, we cannot doubt that when he returned to the place where he had first built his altar, and called there again upon the name of the Lord, he did so with deep and sincere repentance for the fault into which he had been betrayed. And may all we, who in like manner have been overtaken, in like manner betake ourselves to God in penitential supplication ; let us call upon his name, and throw ourselves upon his mercy : let us return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon us ; and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon. The devotions of Abram produced in him what real devotion at all times will—a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price ; and this temper of mind speedily found an occasion for

* Wogan's Essay on the Proper Lessons. † Heb. xi. 8.

its exercise. Strife arose between the herdsmen of Abram, and the herdsmen of Lot: the land where they dwelt was not able to bear them, that they might remain together. How kind and generous in this state of things was the conduct of Abram! he had a promise of the whole land; he was the elder, and the uncle of Lot; but he gave up at once all these well-grounded claims to a preference, and said to his nephew, "Let there be no strife I pray thee between me and thee, for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself I pray thee from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."* God looked with approbation upon this rare want of selfishness, and immediately rewarded it, by a renewal of his promise of giving him the whole land, in more explicit terms than before: "Arise," he said, "walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee."† Abram obeyed; and while Lot, without expressing any thankfulness, or showing any modesty in his choice, fixed upon the vale of Sodom, because of its beauty and richness, as his future residence, in spite of the morals of its inhabitants, he patiently removed his tent, and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, among the mountains of Hebron, and builded there an altar to the Lord. Lot in the mean time, who had gone down to enjoy the richness of his new dwelling-place, found himself involved in its misfortunes. A war between the five kings of the plain of Jordan and four eastern princes, terminated in the defeat of the former: Sodom was plundered, and among others Lot and his family were carried away captives. This fate had justly befallen him, for going to live in so wicked a city, which

* Gen. xiii. 8.

† Ver. 17.

besides was in rebellion against its sovereign, the king of Elam; but when the news of it was brought to Abram, his affection for his unhappy nephew, unsubdued by his past ingratitude or folly, urged him to take immediate steps for his rescue. He summoned together his servants; and, with some slight assistance from the neighbouring Amorite tribes, he overtook and routed the retreating conquerors, and came back in triumph with Lot, and with the spoils. These latter he might fairly have kept for himself; but the same high spirit which enabled him to win them, prevented his retaining any portion of them from their lawful owners, with the exception of a tenth, which, as an acknowledgment of that power who had given him victory, he made over to Melchisedec, king of Salem, the priest of the most high God. That remarkable personage, whom the Epistle to the Hebrews shows us that we are to consider as a type of Christ, brought forth bread and wine, and bestowed on Abram a blessing from his God.* With this exception, Abram restored to the king of Sodom the whole plunder of his city, requiring him only to give a portion to the friends who had attended him in his pursuit. Praiseworthy and spirited as this action of his had been, it had made him powerful enemies; and what disquieted him still more, he as yet saw no means by which the promise of God relating to his numerous offspring was likely to be fulfilled: he went childless, and seemed now looking to the probability of his principal steward becoming his heir. God, therefore, to reassure him on both these heads, declared to him first, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;"† and secondly, that Eliezer should not be his heir, but a son of his own; adding, that his descendants should be numerous as the stars

* Heb. v. 10; vi. 20; vii. 1—17.

† Gen. xv. 1.

which then were shining in heaven. "And he believed in the Lord, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."* "Against hope," as says St. Paul to the Romans, "he believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform."† At this time, also, the Lord declared to him in a vision the tribulation that should hereafter await his descendants in a strange land, before they took possession of their inheritance, specifying the ten nations which then occupied it, and noticing as a reason for the delay of four hundred years, that the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full. So merciful and long-suffering is the Lord to sinners, so graciously does he wait for the repentance of any who will flee from the wrath to come! The promise of God to Abraham had been, that he should have a son; but as he had received no distinct assurance as to its mother, and Sarai's barrenness continued as before, he took unto him, at her own request, her Egyptian handmaid, who, having conceived by him, and becoming proud of this favourable change in her condition, offended her mistress by some contemptuous behaviour, and was accordingly driven forth by Sarai's harsh treatment, to wander in the wilderness. There an angel of God found her, and commanded her to return home, and demean herself more submissively for the future; describing to her, in forcible terms, the character which her son Ishmael should hereafter bear: "He will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren:"‡ a character which has continued even

* Gen. xv. 6.

† Rom. iv. 18, 20, 21.

‡ Gen. xvi. 12.

to this very day to distinguish his descendants, the Arabians, who, though surrounded by nations which they continually provoke by their habits of plunder, have never yet been subdued by any, and have preserved their peculiar customs and manners of life unchanged from the most ancient times. Ishmael, for thirteen years after his birth, remained in his father's house, the apparent heir of his possessions, and of the promises of God. During this time no revelation from heaven seems to have been made to Abram; at the end of it the Lord again appeared to him, and said, "I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect."* Perhaps there may have been some remissness of duty on the part of the patriarch, during this long suspension of the Divine communications, which required this admonition: perhaps his conduct in quitting his lawful wife to seek the company of Hagar was not altogether blameless in the eyes of God; or possibly, the saying was intended as a warning to prepare him for the still more extraordinary trials of his faith which God had yet in store for him. This one son Ishmael was the only one as yet born to him, and he was now ninety-nine years old and nine: yet his name was at this time changed to Abraham, because, said God, "I have made thee a father of many nations; and I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and kings shall come out of thee."† All this Abraham believed with an unshaken faith: and, as a token of his belief, he was commanded to submit, with all the males of his family, to the ceremony of circumcision, which thenceforward was to be adopted as the token of a covenant between God and him, by the succeeding generations of his offspring. To this also he readily submitted, with Ishmael his son; but when he circumcised this

* Gen. xvii. 1.

† Verses 5, 6.

latter, it was not as his heir. Another communication had been made to him at the same time, of a yet more surprising nature: Sarai's name was to be changed to Sarah; and she, the barren woman, now nearly ninety years of age, was to become the joyful mother of a son: "yea, I will bless her," said the Lord, "and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her."* Abraham was astonished at this, but he did not for a moment doubt that so it would be: his first emotion was one of joy and pious exultation—he fell on his face and laughed. Mingle thus, when you think upon God's promises to you, your rejoicing with devotion, with praise, and prayer; let them all be, as saith the apostle, "yea and amen in Christ unto the glory of God by us."† The next thought that crossed the mind of Abraham was, solicitude for the fate of that beloved son whom God had given him already. He knew that the birth of the promised seed would deprive Ishmael of his birthright, and therefore he addressed himself to God, saying, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!"‡ The answer he received, was a promise of temporal blessings in abundance for Ishmael, coupled with an assurance that the establishment of the spiritual covenant was reserved for the yet unborn Isaac. It is our duty to pray for all: God dispenseth his free favours as it hath pleased him, and no man can complain that he has less than his due. Ishmael was the child of Abraham, and as such he received his share of worldly good; but "they which are the children of the flesh are not all children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."§

* Gen. xvi. 16.

† 2 Cor. i. 20.

‡ Gen. xvii. 18.

§ Rom. ix. 8.

CHAP. IX.

ISHMAEL AND ISAAC.

AFTER Abraham had rescued his nephew Lot from the captivity into which his residence in Sodom had caused him to fall, the latter determined, it appears, in spite of the danger he had incurred, to take up his abode again within that wicked city; and remained there, grieved indeed by the filthy conversation of the sinners among whom he sojourned,* yet wanting strength of mind, and singleness of religious purpose to quit them, because in so doing, he must have quitted also a country of the most pleasant and luxuriant description, "even as the garden of the Lord."† And this want of pious resolution might perhaps have caused him to be involved in the terrible destruction which was now impending over the cities of that lovely plain, had not God "remembered Abraham," and for his sake "sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt."‡ We see here what an advantage it was to him that he was connected with a truly godly and pious man: let us, therefore, value such connexions highly, and strive to form them when we have the means. Times may occur, when even "a man" so qualified may be unto you "as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest:"§ never, however, forgetting that higher brotherhood and guardianship, to which above all things you should have recourse, of Him who is the one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, without whose gracious intercession and inter-

* 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

† Gen. xix. 29.

‡ Gen. xiii. 10.

§ Isaiah xxxii. 2.

vening merits your own righteousness will avail you nothing in the hour of judgment ; but the work of his righteousness shall be peace, and its effect quietness and assurance for ever.* God, being about to execute wrath upon the guilty, condescended to declare his purpose to his servant Abraham, a proceeding which both did him honour, as the favoured individual to whom the promises had been made, and marked him out as a fit person, by his exemplary conduct, to be still further the depositary of the hidden counsels of God. Accordingly the Divine Being appeared to him as he sat before his tent door, in the plains of Mamre, where, ever since his first separation from Lot, he had established his residence and his altar. The manner of the appearance was, that he saw three men coming towards him, whom at first he treated as casual guests, with becoming respect and hospitality. After a time it was in some manner or other revealed to him that he was in the presence of the Lord : the promise that his wife Sarah should have a son was now first made in her hearing, and received by her, with laughter indeed as it had been by him, but of so different a character, expressing rather contempt and unbelief, than the pious satisfaction which his had manifested, that it called forth a rebuke from the heavenly visitant ; who, when he afterwards proceeded towards Sodom, attended by Abraham, to a point from whence the city might be seen, declared to him the intention with which he had come down, namely, to examine into the sinfulness of that city, and to punish it accordingly. Then six times did that tender-hearted patriarch take upon himself to supplicate his indulgent Lord, and obtained from him an assurance, first, that if fifty, and at last that if even ten righteous persons were to be found

* Isaiah xxxii. 17.

within the city, he would not destroy it for the sake of those ten. So truly are righteous men the salt of the earth, the preservers of those among whom they are! so precious ought they to be to every community, instead of being, as they too often are, thought deserving only of its contempt! In the evening of that day Lot also entertained unawares two angels as his guests,* and was protected by them from the brutal attack made upon him by the whole population of Sodom, because he refused to yield them up, who had come under the shadow of his roof. Nor did they limit their interference in his behalf to this single instance of power; before the morning arose they hastened him forth, with his wife and daughters, his sons-in-law refusing to follow, beyond the gates of the city, and across the plain as far as Zoar, a little town, which, through the intercession of Lot in its behalf, was spared out of the terrible destruction which his heavenly guides assured him was at hand. His wife alone, disregarding the commandment that had been given them not to look behind, turned her face back towards Sodom, and was changed into a pillar of salt. And may every one who is inclined to neglect the warnings of God, and to look back to the pleasures of sin at the risk of its punishment, "remember Lot's wife:"† and may the remembrance through grace keep them steadfast in the way which leadeth unto salvation. As Lot entered into Zoar at sun-rise, the foretold vengeance was accomplished: "The Lord rained down fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven"‡ upon the cities of the plain; and when Abraham, returning to the place where the day before he had communed with God, looked towards the region that was then so beautiful, he saw to his sorrow that ten righteous men had not been found

• Heb. xiii. 2.

† Luke xvii. 32.

‡ Gen. xix. 24.

to fulfil the condition of mercy. "The smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace,"* and the valley became, what it has continued to this day, a salt and noisome lake, impregnated with sulphureous vapours; an awful testimonial of the wickedness of man, and of the just judgment of the Lord. What else we hear of Lot reflects no credit upon his character. After a short stay at Zoar, in which he feared to dwell, he retired into the mountains with his daughters; and there, under the influence of wine, had by them two children, Moab and Ben-ammi, the fathers respectively of two well-known nations, the Moabites and Ammonites, both which soon sank into idolatry, were subdued by the children of Israel, and exist no longer. In turning from this scene of frailty and guilt to resume the history of Abraham, we meet at first with an occurrence calculated to excite our surprise and mortification; we find the patriarch, upon his removal into the land of Abimelech, king of Gerar, giving way again to the very same weakness which had prevailed over his faith in Egypt; again calling Sarah his sister, through fear for his life; again losing her for a time, and receiving her anew from Abimelech, who had been warned in a dream of the danger he was incurring by taking her from her husband, and instructed in the course he was to pursue. Having expostulated with them not unreasonably, Abimelech, of whose integrity they appear to have entertained unjust suspicions, bestowed on them various presents, and suffered them to continue in his land. There, shortly afterwards, the son whom God had promised to Abraham was borne to him by Sarah, and circumcised on the eighth day, as God had commanded, receiving the name of Isaac, or "laughter,"—that pious rejoicing, namely, in which Abraham indulged on the first occasion of the

* Gen. xix. 28.

promise, and that in which his better instructed wife was now able to share, being made sensible of the greatness of the blessing vouchsafed to her in her old age.

The first occurrence calculated to disturb the pious gratification felt by the parents of Isaac, was the misconduct of his half brother, Ishmael, who, beginning now to develop his wild and scornful character, was seen by Sarah mocking, and possibly ill-treating, her infant son. Incensed at this, yet furthering in her anger the purposes of God, she demanded of her husband the banishment of Ishmael, and of the bondmaid, his mother; and when Abraham hesitated, through affection for his wayward son, the Lord said unto him, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice, for in Isaac shall thy seed be called."* St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians,† has taught us that these things are an allegory; that is, that besides their historical and literal meaning, they are capable of a spiritual interpretation. Sarah and Hagar respectively signify the two covenants, the one free, the other in bondage; the freewoman representing the freedom of Christianity, the bondwoman the servitude of the Jewish law: the children of the one were like Isaac, the children of promise; the children of the other were like Ishmael, the children of the flesh: and "as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so," says the apostle, "it is now." The Jews of his day were the chief persecutors of the Christians, and did them all the mischief in their power; and though this is the case no longer, yet the carnal and worldly-minded are always disposed to mock at those who are spiritual, and to do them any despite they can, because they

* Gen. xxi. 12.

† Gal. iv. 24—31.

are not after their way, and are clean contrary to their doings.* Ishmael, indeed, was a mere boy when he brought this punishment upon himself by his ill conduct; but "even a child," says the book of Proverbs, "is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right :"[†] he was old enough to have known that he was acting wrong, and in defiance of those good principles with which, in a religious family like that of Abraham, he could not but have been made familiar; and therefore justly was he expelled from a household of which he had shown himself an unworthy member, and to the lordship over which, as the rightful heir of Abraham, it is probable that he still pretended. Accordingly he and his mother went forth together, and wandered in the desert, till, overcome by fatigue and thirst, he sank down and would have died there, had not God, who is not extreme to punish, and had promised Abraham that he would make of this son of his a great nation, showed his afflicted mother a well of water for his present relief, and protected him afterwards throughout the remainder of his life. How often have we not need to pray to him, and say, "O remember not the sins and offences of my youth, but according to thy mercy think thou upon me, O Lord, for thy goodness."[‡] In the mean while, the blessing of God which rested upon the tents of Abraham, and so far increased him in worldly substance and in power, that Abimelech, the king of Gerar, in whose land he sojourned, thought fit to make with him a covenant of alliance, having first afforded him redress with respect to a well of water which his servants had violently taken away. This covenant was made at the place, thence called Beersheba, or the well of the oath, known afterwards as the southern extremity of the

* Wisd. ii. 12, 15.

† Prov. xx. 11.

‡ Psalm xxv. 7.

land of Israel; and there, as was his exemplary custom, Abraham established a place of worship by planting a grove, the temples of those early times, and calling on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. And how were his devotions answered? he received a command which, involving as it did a change in the place and manner of his worship, might have seemed to him at the moment to indicate that his God was dissatisfied with both; He enjoined him to take a distant journey to the land of Moriah, and there to perform a sacrifice, such as barely to think of, must have rent his heart with grief and horror. He was to take his son, his only son, Isaac, whom he loved, and offer him up for a burnt offering on one of the mountains to be pointed out by God. That very child of promise, of whom it had been said to him, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called,"* was demanded of him in his early boyhood, as a victim for God's altar, and he himself was to do the deed. Yet, even while he prepared himself for the work with unshrinking obedience, he was not destitute of hope; his strong faith in the promises of his Maker assured him that what he had once said would surely come to pass, though how he knew not; "accounting, however," as says the apostle to the Hebrews, "that God was able to raise up, if need were, his Isaac from the dead."† And next to a resurrection from the dead, indeed, was the character of his deliverance: when, after the journey of three mournful days, they reached the place of sacrifice; when the father's heart had been wrung by the innocent inquiries of his child for the lamb that was to be offered up; when every preparation was completed, and the patient victim, stretched upon the altar, was on the very point of receiving the death-stroke from Abraham's hand; when faith, tried

* Gen. xxi. 12.

† Heb. xi. 19.

to the utmost, had yielded all to God ; in one happy moment all that it had yielded was restored with an approval and a blessing. " Lay not thine hand upon the lad," said a voice from heaven ; " neither do thou any thing unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."* A ram, caught in the neighbouring thicket by his horns, afforded Abraham a lawful offering ; and this made, " the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven a second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is by the sea-shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies ; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice."† " Not seeds, as of many," says St. Paul to the Galatians ; " but thy seed, which is Christ."‡ From him, the Saviour of the world, the promised blessing is transmitted to all the kindreds of the earth, to all of every nation under heaven who believe and love him, and are his. " They are all one in Christ Jesus."§ " The patriarch Abraham rejoiced to see my day," said Jesus to the Jews, " and he saw it and was glad."|| He saw, doubtless, at that time, the typical nature of the sacrifice which he had prepared upon Moriah, how on that mountain God would hereafter provide a Lamb, who should indeed be slain, and not in a figure only, but in reality, be received again from the dead ; a Lamb whose precious blood-shedding should wash away the sins of every child of Adam, and bring back the lost and banished creation once more into the presence of their God.

* Gen. xxii. 12. † Verses 15—18. ‡ Gal. iii. 16.
§ Gal. iii. 28. || John viii. 56.

CHAP. X.

ESAU AND JACOB.

WHEN Abraham had returned from Moriah to Beersheba, with his son Isaac restored to him, as it were, from the dead, he removed from the latter place to Kirjath-arba, or Hebron, where Sarah his wife died, being an hundred and twenty-seven years old. Of the land so often promised him by God, he did not hold in present possession so much as to set his foot on,* nor did he crave to have any for the purposes of actual enjoyment or dominion; his desire was fixed upon a better country—that is, an heavenly; he “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”† Confessing himself “a stranger and a sojourner”‡ among them, for one thing only did he express a wish to the people of the land: a possession of a burying-place, in which he might deposit the mortal remains of her, who had shared so long and so faithfully the joys and sorrows of his pilgrimage, and in which, when the time came, his own body might be laid beside her. Having, therefore, purchased of Ephron the Hittite, the field and cave of Machpelah, and having there paid the last rites of burial to his departed consort, the widowed father turned his thoughts in the next place to the welfare of his son, for whom, being now of a marriageable age, he shunned the idea of taking a wife of the daughters of the Canaanites, preferring a connexion with those of his own family, who had remained beyond the river Euphrates. “The Lord,” it is said, “had blessed

* Acts vii. 5.

† Heb. xi. 10, 13, 16.

‡ Gen. xxiii. 4.

Abraham in all things,"* and amongst others, in bestowing upon him a wise and religious servant—a man whom he could trust in a matter of so much delicacy and importance, as the choice of a wife for his beloved son. The honourable commission with which this man was entrusted, did not puff him up with any vain notions of his own great sagacity, and peculiar fitness for such a task. Before he approached the city of Nahor, he prayed earnestly to God, intreating him to signify to him, by a simple token, his decision as to the matter : and God, who heareth the prayers of the humble, vouchsafed to grant him the token he requested, and thereby pointed out Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's nephew, as the destined wife of Isaac. The token was an act of hospitality and kindly feeling ; she gave the weary man water to drink out of her pitcher, and drew it also for his camels, till they had done drinking. Encouraged by this, the servant proceeded with her to her father's home, and having made known the purport of his mission, and the answer which God had granted to his prayer, he concluded by demanding her in marriage for his young master Isaac. Her father, and Laban her brother, seeing that the thing proceeded from the Lord, gave their consent at once, which was soon followed by that of the maiden, who accompanied the servant on his homeward journey, was met in the plain by Isaac, and, becoming his wife, occupied the till then vacant tent of his deceased mother Sarah. For although Abraham had married again a woman whose name was Keturah, from whom the Midianites descended, yet Rebekah, as the wife of the heir, seems to have had the preeminence in his household, till he died a good old age, an hundred

* Gen. xxiv. 1.

threescore and fifteen years, and was buried by his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, in the cave which he had bought for Sarah. Renowned among the nations of the East as an illustrious prophet, revered as the great patriarch of the Jews, celebrated in our christian Scriptures as the father of the faithful,—there is not perhaps any merely human character in the world more eminent than Abraham : and yet, my brethren, let us reflect that even this famous man had nothing “whereof to glory before God :” * his full persuasion that his own merits were nothing ; that his Maker was to him, and would be, all in all under every difficulty and trial, is the feature of his character which it behoves us to imitate : “he believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God :” † and this is not recorded in the Scriptures “for his sake alone, but for ours also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” ‡

The blessing of a numerous posterity, which the family of Rebekah had uttered over her, when she took her departure from among them, seemed at first unlikely to take effect : for twenty years after her union with Isaac she bare him no child, nor was it till her husband betook himself to the sure resource of fervent prayer, and intreated the Lord for her, that her barrenness was ended, and she bare him two children at a birth. Before they were born, she had inquired of the Lord concerning them, and had learnt that they would form hereafter the heads of two separate nations, and that the elder of them should serve the younger. It may be that this communication, joined to the natural dispositions of the two children, which

* Rom. iv. 2.

† James ii. 23.

‡ Rom. iv. 23—25.

became apparent as they grew up to manhood, induced her to shew the preference which she did to her younger son Jacob, while Isaac rather loved the eldest, Esau. The former was a plain man, dwelling in tents; of quiet, domestic habits, which endeared him to his mother; while the latter was a cunning hunter, a man of the field, who rejoiced the heart of his father by his manly exertions in pursuit of his prey, and the skill which enabled him to bring it in abundance. One period, however, there was, during which, as it is probable, a famine raged in the land—and the beasts of the field having become proportionably scarce, the hunting of Esau was attended with so little success, that he returned from it fainting with fatigue and hunger. He found his brother Jacob preparing a humble meal of lentile pottage, and bread—for which, however, in his state of weakness and desperation, he agreed at the request of Jacob to exchange his birthright; the act of a profane and irreligious person, as we must confess, when we consider what that birthright was. It was a right both to the sacred office of the patriarchal priesthood, and to the covenant made with Abraham, “that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed;” in other words, that the promised bruiser of the serpent’s head, the restorer of the lost privileges of Adam, should be either himself or one of his direct descendants. This birthright he despised, selling it “for a morsel of meat;” * his carnal appetite and his fear of death prevailed over his faith in the promises of God: “behold, I am at the point to die,” he said, “and what profit shall this birthright do to me?” † But he was not more nearly at the point to die than was his father Isaac, when Abraham had bound him on the altar; and he might have been sure, had he

* Heb. xii. 16.

† Gen. xxv. 32.

clung firmly and reverentially to the possession of his birthright, that it would have been profitable to him in some manner which he had no cause to doubt, because he could not see it at the moment. "But the things which are not seen are eternal;"* while those that are seen for the most part are temporary, and vain, and like the light dust in the balance held by a religious mind. Be it yours to look beyond the loss or advantage of a few short days or years, to the hazard and the hope of endless ages—yours to hold fast your christian birthright, to let nothing separate you from your interest in Jesus, as members of his mystical body, from your love and trust in your redeeming Lord. But beware, while you follow out the privileges of your condition by all lawful means, and seek all such advancement and exaltation as is consistent with the christian character, that you never give way to the temptation of "doing evil that good may come,"†—that while you imitate Jacob in the eagerness with which he desired a good thing, you do not use the means which he adopted for obtaining it. Strive not to rise upon the downfall of a brother: take not advantage of any man's misfortunes to gain somewhat of him; remember that unkind and uncharitable conduct are no fruits of the spirit of grace, and walk always as nearly as you may to that blessed rule which Christ has given you, "to do unto others as you would that they should do unto you." The famine in the land, which on the part of Esau was the probable cause for his shameful surrender of his birthright, became also an occasion of stumbling, though in a less degree, to his father Isaac. That patriarch had been forced by it to go down to Gerar, the city of Abimelech the Philistine; and while there, had but too exactly imitated

* 2 Cor. iv. 18.

† Rom. iii. 8.

the only blamable conduct which we find in the history of Abraham, by giving the title of sister to his wife—a falsehood which was soon detected and rebuked as it deserved. God did not, however, on this account withdraw his favour from him, but blessed him with large increase of his possessions, to a degree that provoked the envy of the Philistines, and caused several disputes between them and his herdmen, during which he shewed an exemplary forbearance, and which were happily appeased at last by a solemn covenant between him and their king. The Lord also appeared unto him at Beersheba, and renewed to him the promises which he had made to Abraham his father. And this assurance of God's protection appears to have been highly needful to sustain the patriarch under those evils incidental to our mortal condition, which were now about to become his lot. The first of these was the distress caused by the proceedings of Esau; who, regardless of his parent's feelings, and the strongly expressed commands of his grandfather Abraham in a similar instance, had allied himself by marriage to two women of that country, whose dissolute manners and idolatrous customs were a constant "grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah." * The next was the increasing infirmities of age (for he had now reached his hundred and thirty-sixth year, at which age his uncle Ishmael died), accompanied by loss of sight. These things being a warning to Isaac, that he might not have much longer to live, he prepared himself to bestow solemnly upon his elder son and fancied heir, his favourite Esau, the blessing which belonged to the birthright. For it does not appear that Jacob, who had possessed himself of it in the manner before related, had ever dared to acquaint his father with

* Gen. xxvi. 35.

the discreditable transaction : but now, hearing from his mother the directions given by Isaac to Esau, to go out into the field and take him savoury venison, such as he loved, that his soul might bless him before his death, he felt that it was necessary to obtain the one as well as the other ; and therefore, though not without some fear of the consequences, he consented to the fraudulent device of Rebekah, and disguised himself in such a manner, as, while his brother was absent, might enable him to procure the blessing from the unsuspecting Isaac. The well-laid stratagem succeeded, not however without the assistance of a profane and direct falsehood uttered by his lips. " I am Esau thy first-born : I have done according as thou badest me : arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son ? And he said, Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." * The father's blessing was obtained by these means, for God had willed that in this line, and not in that of Esau, his own Anointed should be born : but personally, as to Jacob himself, considered apart from his posterity, it had little or no effect ; his remorse, even at the moment, must have been painful indeed, though not strong enough to make him renounce his treacherous purpose ; and his after life was a mingled scene of trials, and sufferings, and repentance, far different from that undisturbed possession of his father's home, which he probably pictured to himself as the result of obtaining his blessing before he died. Esau's indignation at finding himself again supplanted, now burst forth without restraint ; he endeavoured at first with tears † to find some place of repentance or retraction in his father Isaac, but soon perceiving that this might not

* Gen. xxvii. 19, 20.

† Heb. xii. 17.

be, he turned his ungovernable fury against his brother, and hated him, and threatened his death.

Again did Rebekah interpose, and at this time with more reason, in behalf of her favourite son : she would not wound the feelings of her husband by communicating to him the bloody resolution of Esau, but under the pretext of obtaining for Jacob a more suitable marriage than those which his elder brother had contracted, she procured him to be sent away to the house of Laban, his uncle, where he might remain till a better spirit should appear in Esau, and render it safe for him to return. Such are the fruits of deception and fraud ; such confusion and evil await every family, where one portion of it is employed in overreaching another, to further its own ends : may we be warned by the sad scene which it presents to us to shun it for ourselves : may we feel how “ good and blessed a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity ; ” * and pray to God, who maketh men to be of one mind in a house, † that he will bestow upon us such a measure of christian love and concord, that we may seek each other’s welfare as we seek our own, and peace may be in our dwellings, and among us.

CHAP. XI.

JACOB IN PADAN-ARAM.

WHEN Jacob, instead of remaining, as he had flattered himself, in his father’s house, the undoubted inheritor of his possessions, was forced


* Psalm cxxxiii. 1.

† Psalm lxviii. 6. O. V.

to flee out of it into Syria, from the face of his angry brother, he must have begun that long and lonely journey with no enviable feelings. In addition to his dread of the revengeful Esau, a fear that by the duplicity of his conduct he had deeply offended his father's God must have thrown a gloom over his spirits, not easily to be removed ; he must have felt it at least doubtful, whether what he anticipated in his first feeble expostulation with Rebekah had not come to pass, and that he had brought in reality a curse upon himself, and not a blessing. But God, who knows and pities the frailties of his servants, who saw how much of sterling piety and goodness there was in Jacob, though debased for a time by the meanness of which he had been guilty, after he had made him feel some little of the bitterness attached to sin, returned to look upon him again with favour. The fatigued and houseless wanderer, who, when the night came on, laid himself down to sleep on the bare earth, resting his head upon the stones which he had taken for his pillow, saw in his dreams a vision of his Maker, standing above a ladder which reached from earth to heaven, and on which the angels of God were ascending and descending. This representation was of itself calculated to cheer and support him, and to fill him with humble and grateful acknowledgments of the Divine providence and care ; but, in addition to this, he received from his gracious Lord a solemn renewal of the blessing which he had before obtained without his sanction, and an assurance of future protection and guidance, which should never fail, till God had "done all which he had spoken to him of."* The vision, full of comfort as it was, made Jacob tremble with a holy awe—he felt that he was in the hands of a God who was ever about his path, and

* Gen. xxviii. 15.

about his bed, and spied out all his ways—he saw the magnitude of his folly and offence, in thinking that the arts of falsehood could effect any thing against the counsels of such a Being—and, humbly accepting his offered protection, he promised obedience and worship in return. As an earnest of the latter, he set up the stone, which had lain under his head, in the form of a pillar, and pouring oil on the top of it, consecrated it to be hereafter a house of God, or holy place, to which he probably intended to bring the tenths of all that the Lord should give him, as a dedicated offering. Then, with a lighter heart, he proceeded on his journey; and arriving at Haran, met first of all with Rachel, the daughter of his uncle Laban; struck with whose beauty, he entered into an engagement with her father, to serve him seven years, if he would give her him to wife. His mother, in her anxiety for his safety, had sent him away, that he might tarry a few days with her brother Laban, till Esau's fury had subsided: he had now, by his own act, precluded himself from returning homeward for seven years, however friendly a reception he might meet with there. He had bound himself over to a servitude, attended, as it appears, with much responsibility and much discomfort: his duty was to tend the flocks of his master, and he was expected to deduct from his wages the value of any of them which chanced either to be lost or stolen: in the day the drought consumed him, and the frost by night; his sleep departed from his eyes. Thus it was that the would-be heir of all his father's possessions became first an exile, and then a servant. We shall see next how the practiser of falsehood was doomed himself to be overreached by a craftier than he. He had served seven years for Rachel, and his love for her had made them seem but a few days; how grievous, then, must have been his disappointment, when he found that Laban had, under the cover



of night, deceived him into marrying not the object of his long-tried affection, but her sister Leah; and that the price set upon Rachel was the additional servitude of another seven years: it was a harsh but a wholesome lesson, and one on which all those who think that guile and deceit are good means of thriving, will do well to ponder. We shall see now that Laban's craftiness stood him in as little stead as Jacob's had before. The latter, being now possessed of his two wives, and having served his full time of fourteen years, was desirous to depart; but Laban, willing to make some further profit of him, persuaded him to stay; and it was agreed, that his future wages should be determined by the colour of the lambs that should be born—~~those that were speckled to be his, those that were white to be Laban's.~~ The apparent advantage was all on Laban's side, for the whole of his flock was white; but Jacob, by an ingenious device, which God sanctioned in a dream, procured that all the best and strongest of them should bear speckled lambs; and thus, in the course of six years during which this agreement subsisted, increased his possessions greatly at the expense of his avaricious father-in-law, who, having several times changed the terms of the compact without effect, at length began to look upon him with envy and dislike, and gave him, by this alteration of his manner towards him, a full excuse for quitting him abruptly, without the ceremony of leave-taking, removing with him his wives, their handmaids, and his twelve children, and all the goods which he had gotten in Haran. Incensed at this, and at the loss of his teraphim, or idol gods, which Rachel had taken with her, either with the intent to wean her father from their vain worship, or with a lingering fondness for it herself, Laban pursued and overtook the fugitives: but being warned by God in a dream to do them no harm, and moreover

failing to find his teraphim, or to establish any just ground of complaint against Jacob, who had rather cause to lay blame on him, his better feelings prevailed, and he entered into a covenant with his son-in-law, to abstain in future from attempting to injure one another. An heap of stones was set up as a memorial of their covenant, called by Laban in his language Jegar-sahadutha, and by Jacob Galeed, or the heap of witness. Having escaped this danger, the patriarch now felt himself on the point of encountering another, even more formidable : the messengers whom he sent forward to Esau, announcing his approach, brought him back word, " thy brother cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him." * Such a force, thought the terrified Jacob, could attend him with no other intent than that of mischief : and therefore, having taken such precautions as human prudence dictated, by dividing his party into two bands, that if one of them was attacked, the other might have time to escape, and by sending before him a liberal present, to appease if possible the dangerous Esau, he then betook himself to the surest refuge of all, by earnest prayer to God. His prayer is so excellent a model of what such supplications should be, that I insert it entire. " O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee : I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant : for with my staff I passed over this Jordan ; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau ; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And

* Gen. xxxii. 6.

thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude."* This frank confession of his own unworthiness, this touching appeal to the truth and mercy of his father's God, was heard, as the event shows us, in heaven; that very night a mysterious occurrence, a wrestling with an angel in human form, showed him at once the weakness of his own frail nature, and the power which through faith and persevering prayer it is permitted to obtain with God. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me,"† is that which, through Christ that strengtheneth him, every petitioner is allowed to say to Him from whom all good proceedeth.

The next day Esau appeared in sight, with his four hundred men, and the brothers met: but how different was their meeting from that which Jacob had expected before his prayer! There were no angry words, no bloodshed, no slaughter: Jacob approached his brother with becoming reverence; "and Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept."‡ When Esau wept before, it was for sorrow and rage, that he had been defrauded by his brother; he now shed upon his neck the tears of reconciliation and joy; in the moment when he might have wreaked his vengeance, his anger was disarmed, and the spirit of brotherly affection triumphed in his bosom over the spirit of hate. How plainly do we recognise in this the work of God; what an encouragement is it to fervent prayer, when we see it thus clearly and mercifully answered; when we are favoured with so marked an instance of the important truth, that "whatsoever we shall ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive!"§ And

* Gen. xxxii. 9—12.

† Ver. 26.

‡ Gen. xxxiii. 4.

§ Matt. xxi. 22.

the prayer, we may observe also, was as effectual in behalf of Esau himself, as in behalf of Jacob who made it: if it saved the one from suffering a calamity, it saved the other from committing a crime. Esau returned homeward with pure hands; and a lightened heart, enriched by the free gift of a portion of his brother's possessions, not degraded by the seizure of the whole. Yea, he quitted, of his own accord, that country where Jacob meant to settle, in order to make room for him; and, according to the prophecy of Isaac, that he should live by his sword, having dispossessed by force the Horites of Mount Seir,* established himself in their land, thenceforth called Edom. Jacob, in the meanwhile, proceeded on his **journey in security and peace: he sojourned** for a while at Succoth, probably to refresh his family and cattle after the fatigues of their long journey; and then took up what, from the circumstance of his buying a piece of land, it seems that he intended to be a more permanent residence, in the neighbourhood of Shalem, the city of Shechem and Hamor, the Hivites. And there also, after the example of his grandfather Abraham, he built an altar, and called it El Elohe Israel, meaning, God the God of Israel—Israel being the new name which had been given him on that memorable night when he wrestled with the angel, and as a prince had power with God. But in all this, though done no doubt with good intentions, there was a forgetfulness of duty. The attempt to purchase an abiding dwelling-place seems contrary to the declarations of God to the patriarchs, that they were to consider themselves as pilgrims and strangers in the land; his intention of returning to his father's house seems also to have been strangely forgotten; and, above all, his solemn vow, to renew in a public

* Deut. ii 12; Gen. xxxvi. 6.

manner the worship of God at Bethel, to have passed away from his mind. Such are but too often the effects of prosperity; it makes men careless and inactive, too much occupied in admiring what they have and what they are, to leave them time to think of what they need, and what they ought to be. And when the servants of God are thus tempted to abuse his gifts, he often in his mercy awakens them, by some touch of distress and calamity, to a sense of what they owe him. This was the case with Jacob: his daughter Dinah, yielding to an idle curiosity to see and consort with the daughters of the land, became the prey of a ravisher in the person of Shechem, the son of Hamor, upon whom, together with his father, her brothers Levi and Simeon soon executed a bloody and deceitful vengeance; a crime which Jacob, though he did not punish it at the time, was compelled, by the spirit of righteous judgment, to curse in the prophecy of his latter days. In that neighbourhood, after so cruel a slaughter of the Shechemites, he could not remain; and then it was that God graciously reminded him of his former vow, and directed his steps to Bethel, where, having first commanded his family to put away the remaining relics of idolatry, he fulfilled it by consecrating a pillar in a more solemn manner than before, and pouring a drink-offering thereon. And there God blessed him; as he will bless all those who carefully perform the promises which they have made to him, and worship him as their Almighty Guardian and Preserver, in spirit and in truth.

CHAP. XII.

JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN.

ALTHOUGH after the departure of Jacob from Bethel, in the direction of Hebron, where his father dwelt, another son was born to him by his beloved Rachel, at the expense of her own life (for she died in giving birth to Benjamin,) yet Joseph, both as her eldest born, and as an example of virtues befitting the maturest years, was dearer to him than any other of his children. Some of them, Reuben especially, and in a less degree Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher, were guilty of offences which came to their father's ears, and doubtless caused him much affliction and sorrow of heart:* and in addition to these, the preference which he showed for Joseph caused them to entertain a malignant hatred against that innocent youth, which they had not long afterwards an opportunity of indulging. This disposition in them was increased also by the circumstances of two dreams, indicating his future superiority over them, with which, in the simplicity and openness of his heart, he had made them acquainted: so that when they saw him, sent by his father from Hebron to join them where they fed their flocks, drawing near unto them, "they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh; come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams."† Two only of the ten appear to have felt some touch of compassion for the unhappy victim. Reuben counselled them not

* Gen. xxxv. 22; xxxvii. 2; xxxviii. 18.

† Chap. xxxvii. 19, 20.

to kill him, but to cast him into the pit, with the intention of coming back as soon as they were gone, and delivering him from thence: and during his temporary absence, it was by the advice of Judah that they changed their purpose of leaving him to die of starvation in the pit, to that of selling him to a company of Midianite merchants, who chanced to be passing by that way on their journey to Egypt with the productions of Gilead. Reuben, who saw his charitable intentions frustrated, and knew not what had become of Joseph, seems to have thought it best to join with his brethren in the delusion which they practised towards their father: showing him the particoloured coat, (which, in a moment of perhaps too partial affection, he had caused his favourite son to wear,) as having found it stained with blood in the wilderness, a sad proof that its wearer had been devoured by some savage beast; and offering him false and hypocritical consolations in his agony of grief, which they themselves had caused. But God all the while was overruling these their wicked actions to purposes of good: the inducement being removed, envying and hatred troubled no longer the family of Jacob: and he who had been the cause of it, though innocently so, was transferred to a place where his good qualities and religious principles were to endure indeed a formidable trial, but to receive a high reward. In the house of his Egyptian master, the Lord was with Joseph, and the zeal and alacrity, which, through the grace that was granted him, he was enabled to show, in every portion of his service, soon rendered him a most important member of the household, and caused him at last to be entrusted with its chief management. It was then that his mistress endeavoured to seduce him to commit a most grievous breach of trust, and audacious sin against God; and when his chastity was proof against

her temptations, she wickedly accused him of attempting the very crime which he had virtuously resisted, and caused him to be cast into prison, where still the Lord was with him. Happy is he who can carry with him into the house of human chastisement and bondage the favour of his God : he need not fear what man can do unto him, he need not trust in any mortal help to bring him out thence with honour ; in his Lord's good time his cause shall come to be known, and his innocence be rendered clear as the noon day. It will be so in another life, if not in this : in the case of Joseph ample amends were made him while he lived here, for the period of his tribulation. Raised by his good conduct to an office of trust within the prison, he was enabled by God's Spirit, to interpret the dreams of two of the chief servants of Pharaoh : and though the fulfilment was forgotten for a while by that one of them who was benefited thereby, yet was the circumstance afterwards recalled to his remembrance by a dream of the king himself, which none of his wise men were able to interpret. Then the neglected and forgotten Joseph was sent for from the prison, and having explained to the king his dream, attributing with all due humility his power of doing so to God, and having also pointed out the best course to be pursued in the emergency of seven years of famine, which it predicted—he was rewarded by the grateful monarch with a post of honour and authority next to himself in his kingdom, and with a charge to take all those salutary measures for the public sustenance which he had so wisely recommended. This, during the seven preceding years of plenty, he busied himself in performing : corn was laid up in such abundance, as to form a provision in the ensuing dearth, not only for the Egyptians themselves, but for the inhabitants of many neighbouring countries also, who came down

to buy it from thence. Jacob, in the mean time, having buried, in conjunction with his reconciled brother Esau, their father Isaac in a good old age, endeavoured to console himself, in training up the youthful Benjamin, for the loss of Rachel and of Joseph; when the pressure of famine compelled him to send up his other ten sons into Egypt, in order to make a purchase of food. There they realized the first dream of Joseph, by bowing themselves to the ground in his presence, not knowing him, altered as he was in dress and appearance, though immediately recognised by him. If he had borne malice or hatred in his heart, what an opportunity for taking vengeance was now before him! Punish them he did, but it was a mild and brotherly chastisement, calculated to awaken in them feelings of remorse and repentance, and to render them worthy of the kindnesses which he purposed to show them in the end. A three days' imprisonment was all that he inflicted upon those who had sold him into a state of bondage, from which there was no probability of his obtaining his release: at the expiration of that time he sent them home again, exacting from them as the condition of their dismissal, an assurance that they would return and bring with them their youngest brother, as a proof that their account of themselves was true; and retaining one of them, Simeon, in safe custody, until they should come again. The corn which they had come to buy, he allowed them to take with them; and not only that, but the money with which they had bought it was found by each of them in the mouth of his sack—a mixture of harshness and liberality which filled them with astonishment, while the emotion excited in their father's mind by the events which had befallen them was one of unmingled distress. For a long while his affection for Benjamin, caused him to resist their

entreaties to allow the boy to depart : at last, when their supply of food was exhausted, and more must needs be sought in Egypt, he yielded to necessity, and sent them with a present to the ruler of the land, as well as a sufficiency of money to pay for the corn formerly obtained, and to procure a fresh supply. Having thus discharged the obligations of justice and of a liberal policy, Israel committed the success of their expedition with pious resignation to his God. "God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin : if I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."* On their arrival, the anxiety which they naturally felt as to the sort of reception they might meet with, was dissipated by the honourable and kind treatment which Joseph's principal steward was enjoined to afford them : nor was this all ; Joseph himself admitted them to share in the festivities of his house ; and though his heart yearned upon his brother Benjamin, he contented himself with paying him especial honour at the banquet, intending to subject the whole of them to one trial more, before he disclosed himself unto them. This he did, by ordering his silver cup to be privately placed in Benjamin's sack, after it had been laden with the corn which they had purchased ; and then, after they had departed on their journey homeward, sending his steward to overtake them, and charge them with the theft. The truth of the accusation being apparently proved by the discovery of the cup, he caused them all to be brought back again, now, indeed, in the utmost alarm and wretchedness, that he in whose possession it was found might suffer the penalty of his offence. Judah stood forth in that terrible moment, and interceded with him for Benjamin : he

* Gen. xliii. 14.

declared to him with what difficulty the consent of his aged father had been wrung from him by hard necessity, that the boy should go down with them at all—now certainly, the knowledge of the fate that had befallen him would bring down the grey hairs of Israel with sorrow to the grave; and finally, with a noble self-devotion, he offered to be left in bondage instead of his brother, for whom he had become a surety, and without whom he could not bear to return. Then Joseph could refrain himself no longer; but, causing all others to quit the apartment, he threw off at once the character of the stern judge and awful ruler, and made himself known unto his brethren. “I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?”* They hesitated for a while, their spirits being perplexed by so sudden a change, till he made them come nearer unto him, and repeated, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt:” and, lest the recollection of that circumstance should only add to their alarm, he went on thus,—“Now, therefore, be not grieved or angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life.” Their crime was not the less, because this good event had proceeded out of it; but when they heard their brother look upon it in this point of view, they felt assured that he had forgiven it. They had nothing to fear from him, and therefore they with joy received his embraces, and accepted the invitation he gave them, to bring down their father and their households to be nourished by him in Egypt, during the continuance of the famine, of which five years still remained. Full of these joyous tidings, they hastened back to calm the anxiety of their father. The old man’s heart at first fainted when he heard them, and he believed them

* Gen. xlv. 3—5.

not. When, however, he saw the actual preparations which had been made for his journey, the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, his spirit revived: "and Israel said, It is enough! Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die."* His journey was a happy one: at Beersheba he was gladdened by a vision of God, encouraging him to perform it; and when he arrived at the part of Egypt called Goshen, he was met by his long-lost son, and they wept tears of joy upon each other's necks. In Goshen, by the advice of Joseph, he asked Pharaoh's leave to take up his habitation: it was a country rich in pasturage, and thus peculiarly fitted for those who lived by their flocks and herds, an occupation disliked by the Egyptians, who on this account gave them undisturbed possession of one of the best portions of the land; and this at a time when, to obtain the corn laid up in the king's store-houses, the natives of the country, with the exception of the priests only, were obliged to make over their possessions to Pharaoh, receiving them again to hold under him at a fixed rent of a fifth part of the produce.

Thus calmly and happily, in comparison with the earlier portions of his mortal pilgrimage, did Jacob draw near his end; he saw his descendants flourishing around him; he saw Joseph, whom he had mourned as dead, enjoying the fulness of worldly glory, and what is better far, the favour of his God. He saw the two sons born to Joseph in Egypt, not indeed with his bodily organs, for his eyes had become dim with age, but in the spirit of prophecy, as two of the tribes into which his offspring would thenceforward be divided; and blessed them not according to their seniority, but Ephraim principally, and Manasseh in the second place, according to the

* Gen. xlv. 28.

respective importance which they would hereafter enjoy. On each of his sons he bestowed a parting word: on some a rebuke, on some a benediction; but to Judah he promised a continuance of the ruling sceptre, until "Shiloh," that is, until Christ, should come,* unto whom would the gathering of the people be. Then, waiting patiently for the Lord's salvation, the patriarch died, and at his own request was buried in the grave of his fathers in the land of Canaan. Joseph his son survived him fifty years, dealing consistently and mildly with his brethren, who feared without cause, that when their father was gone he might change his conduct towards them; and then died also, not forgetting the land of promise, but "by faith made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones,"† that they should carry them up with them when they quitted Egypt, and bury them in that land.

CHAP. XIII.

THE EGYPTIAN BONDAGE.

IN the foregoing history of the patriarchal times, we have seen the favour and protection of God extended for the most part over one single family: we have now to look upon that family multiplied into a nation, and still preserving, under the altered circumstances of its condition, the distinctive privilege of being considered by the Most High his own peculiar people. The saying, however, which is at all

* Gen. xlix. 10.

† Heb. xi. 22.

times true concerning those whom he has chosen unto himself, that their entrance into his kingdom is through much tribulation, was remarkably illustrated in the case of this his first and typical inheritance. A new king, we are told, arose up over Egypt, who knew not Joseph: if, which is doubtful, he was a descendant of the former Pharaoh, he ungratefully neglected the memory of the man to whom he owed so large a portion of his own prosperity and power, and saw only in his countrymen a rapidly increasing multitude of strangers, whose flourishing state excited his jealousy, while their want of ability to resist, tempted him to exercise upon them the most barbarous oppression. His order to the midwives, to kill every son born of the Hebrew women, having been disobeyed, owing to their conscientious firmness, he next charged his own people with the cruel office of casting every male child into the river; while those who were already grown up he condemned to serve with rigour, principally in works of building, of which two of his treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses,* are mentioned as the results. About the time that this cruel edict was first put in force, a child was born in the tribe of Levi, whose parents' names were Amram and Jochebed: he was beautiful to look upon, and, as a fair and beloved treasure, his mother kept him concealed three months, till finding that she could do so no longer, she resolved to commit him to the protection of Providence, placing him in a little ark of bulrushes, constructed so as to keep out the water of the river, in which she laid him among the flags, which grew in abundance along its brink. And God, who saw in the babe the future deliverer and ruler of his people, watched over him for good: the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river, saw the

* Exod. i. 11.

ark, and caused it to be opened : the tears of the infant (for it wept) moved her compassion ; and comprehending the cause of its exposure, she determined to adopt it as her own. Miriam, the child's sister, who stood near to watch what would become of it, made a proposal, which was favourably received, to procure for it a nurse among the Hebrew women ; and thus did its own mother obtain the privilege of nursing it in security, till it was sufficiently grown up to be taken into the palace of the princess, and treated as her son. Moses (for such was the name given him, in allusion to his having been drawn out of the water) remained forty years in the house of his protectress, and profited of the advantages which it afforded him, so as to become "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in words and deeds."* Nor was it only the wisdom of this world in which he had become instructed ; God, it appears, had communicated to him a portion of the heavenly knowledge enjoyed by his patriarchal ancestors : he had received into his soul a firm conviction, that "the reproach of Christ," the endurance of calamity as an heir of the promise, "was greater riches than the treasures of Egypt:" and therefore being come to years, he cast in his lot with his persecuted brethren, "refusing to be styled any longer the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, having respect unto the recompense of that reward,"† which is not temporal, but eternal. And this was not all ; his faith was not only that of a consistent member of the society whose fellowship in sufferings he so nobly sought ; it taught him also to look upon himself as a man divinely appointed to release them from their unworthy bondage : for St. Stephen tells

* Acts vii. 22.

† Heb. xi. 24—26.

us, that "when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian; for he supposed his brethren would have understood, how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not. And the next day, he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, *Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye wrong one to another?* But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, *Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? wilt thou kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?* Then fled Moses at that saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons."* He feared not so much "the wrath of the king,"† as the fickle and degraded temper of his countrymen; he feared that he had entered upon an undertaking for which they were not then ripe; and consequently, through faith in that invisible Being, whom nevertheless he looked upon as his guide, he betook himself with readiness to a foreign land, there to wait till the time came when he should be more evidently called upon to proceed to the work. In Madian he allied himself with Zipporah, the daughter of Reuel, or Jethro, priest of the country, who bare him his two sons; the name of the first, Gershom, relating to his exile in a strange land; while that of the younger, Eliezer,‡ expressed his confidence in the help of God, who had delivered him from the sword of Pharaoh. During the forty years that he abode in Madian, the succession of a new king in place of that Pharaoh who had sought his life,§ though it might increase his own personal security, abated

* Acts vii. 23—29.

† Exod. xviii. 3, 4.

† Heb. xi. 27.

§ Chap. ii. 23; iv. 19.

nothing from the affliction of his countrymen : “ they sighed by reason of their bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up to God, by reason of the bondage.” It was at this time, according to the opinion of some learned men, that Heman the Ezrahite, or son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, a man whose wisdom approached that of Solomon, composed the eighty-eighth Psalm—which is justly characterised in our Bibles as a prayer containing a grievous complaint, though, as it seems to me, dictated rather by private than by national calamity. But in whatever words the sorrowful supplications of the bondmen in Egypt were offered up to God, certain it is that out of his great mercy he heard and answered them.

While Moses was feeding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, upon the mount called Horeb, his attention was suddenly arrested by the singular appearance of a bush burning with fire, and yet in no degree consumed : he drew near to examine the cause of this more closely, and, as he approached, was warned by a voice speaking to him out of the midst of the bush, that he was in the presence of his fathers’ God. Awe-struck, he hid his face, and listened to the commission given him to go forth as the messenger of God to Pharaoh, and to deliver out of Egypt his afflicted people, whose cry their Lord had heard. The natural meekness and humility of his character, kept him back for a while from accepting this great honour : he pleaded first his own unworthiness ; and when assured that God would be with him, he suggested, that when he came to the children of Israel, he should not know by what name to call him. This scruple also was removed by the declaration of God’s great name, “ I am that I am : ” * and when he still hesitated, the power of performing three distinct

* Exod. iii. 14.

miracles was granted to him, in order to convince the people that he was really sent from God. Two of these miracles were exhibited before his eyes. Yet still unsatisfied, he urged his want of eloquence as an impediment to the discharge of his mission: this, God assured him, would be remedied by the substitution of his brother Aaron, whenever fluency of discourse was needed: nor was it till he found that the Lord was displeased with him for this excessive reluctance to do his work, that he consented to undertake it. It is a good thing to be humble, so long as our humility does not interfere with the performance of our duty: the faculties which we possess, such as they are, God gave us for his service; and when he requires of us their exertion, it little becomes us to hang back, or to make their deficiencies an excuse for not devoting them to him, whose strength is made perfect in our weakness.* Moses now proceeded on his journey towards Egypt, taking with him, by permission of Jethro, his wife and children; though before he reached that country, he was induced to send them back to the protection of his father-in-law. Before he did this, he had nearly died by a visitation of God, in consequence of having neglected to circumcise his child; so essential was it that he who came in the name of the God of Abraham, should not neglect the positive ordinance which that patriarch had received from him; and so readily, had he continued disobedient, might God have removed him from life, and have chosen another by whom he would send. For no man, because he acts in the name of God and by commission from him, is thereby authorized to violate one of the least of his commandments: they who are led by the Spirit of God, must do the works of God. Though separated from his wife and

* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

children, Moses was soon cheered by the presence of his brother Aaron, who came, divinely directed, to meet him in the wilderness: there they conferred together upon the wondrous task assigned them; and when they reached Egypt, Aaron commenced his portion of the duty, by speaking unto the people of Israel all the words which God had spoken unto Moses; a communication which they received with humble faith and grateful adoration. Far different was the reception that they met with from Pharaoh, when they required of him to let the people go: though their request was limited to obtaining leave to hold a festival to their Lord in the wilderness, a stern rebuke, and a command that the labours of the people should be increased yet more, was all the answer they had from the haughty monarch. But God consoled them under the despondency which this first result of their endeavours could not fail to cause, and encouraged them to go in again unto Pharaoh, and offer to prove their words by the test of a miracle: this miracle, which was the turning of Aaron's rod into a serpent, was imitated by Jannes and Jambres, the Egyptian sorcerers;* and though Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods, yet the partial success of his wise men caused the heart of Pharaoh to be hardened, and he refused to let the people go. So dangerous is a little prosperity, a little success in worldly devices, when it leads men on to fight against God.

The miracles of Moses now changed their character, and became inflictions of punishment upon the proud king, and his blinded subjects: the waters of their river, the rich and fertilizing Nile, were changed into blood, unfit for drinking, and destructive of the fish; and out of them, after the lapse of seven days, came forth an innumerable multitude of frogs, which, contrary

* 2 Tim. iii. 8.

to their usual habits, crawled up into the houses, and even to the beds of the Egyptians, insomuch that no place was exempt from their annoyance; and their very death, when at the prayer of Moses they died, infected the air with noisome vapours. These two miracles also the sorcerers of Egypt were enabled, we know not how, to imitate by their enchantments: at the next, which was productive of a still minuter and more disgusting animal, even lice in all their quarters, they were compelled to own their failure, and said unto Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God."* But this confession, extorted from those in whom he vainly trusted, produced no alteration in the purpose of Pharaoh; and though for a moment his obstinacy gave way before the grievousness of the next plague, an enormous swarm of flies, which become in hot countries an insupportable annoyance, so that he even promised to dismiss the people, on condition that they would not go far; yet even this concession he soon retracted, when the plague which caused it was removed, and resisted with greater obduracy than ever that which followed it, a very grievous murrain upon the cattle and the sheep, from which those belonging to the Israelites were perfectly secure. Then the Lord gave him up to the hardness of his heart, and resolved to make of him a terrible example: the cruel punishment of boils and blains breaking forth on man and beast, had no effect upon him—the rain and hail, which struck down the vines and fig-trees, the barley and the flax, produced in him only a fruitless sentiment of momentary remorse—the dreadful visitation of countless locusts, so long as it lasted, impelled him to express a wish that his bondmen might depart; but the moment a west wind arose and cast them into the Red Sea, the favourable dis-

* Exod. viii. 19.

position passed away from his soul, and left him more hopelessly obstinate than ever, more desperately bent upon his own destruction. Then ensued a thick darkness over all the land of Egypt, a darkness that might be felt: the sun, whom they ignorantly worshipped, refused the comfort of his beams to the dismayed idolaters—they sat in silence and in loneliness, not venturing to move, “fettered,” as it is expressed in the book of Wisdom, “with the bonds of a long night,”* while “all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings”†—an apt image of the gloom and misery of sin, and the illumination and happiness of those who fear their God. Even Pharaoh, hardened as he was, was not altogether insensible to the contrast—he offered to let the people go, if they would leave their flocks and herds behind them: in this he showed a covetous, as he had before showed a haughty mind—the love of gain, or rather the fear of losing what he had unjustly gotten, prevailed over all other fears; and the words of his last communing with Moses were, “Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face, thou shalt die.” And Moses, being full of a prophetic spirit, and foreseeing his speedy overthrow, answered, “Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more.”‡

CHAP. XIV.

THE GOING FORTH OUT OF EGYPT.

THOUGH the last interview of Moses with Pharaoh had been unsuccessful, as regarded its main object, namely, the sending away of the children of Israel out

* Wisd. xvii. 1. † Exod. x. 23. ‡ Ibid. x. 28, 29.

of the land of Egypt, yet the Lord, who knew how soon the determination of that obstinate ruler would be shaken by the terrible blow which still remained to be inflicted on him, began now to work upon the minds of his subjects, inducing them to look with favour upon the Israelites, and to supply them in abundance with valuable gifts, "jewels of silver and jewels of gold,"* under the expectation probably of thereby escaping the wrath of that awful Being who had so visibly bared his arm for the protection of his people. But the long oppression which they had exercised over God's heritage, when it lay in its despised and helpless state, was now to be visited with the fullest chastisement; and that cruel device in particular which aimed at the enfeebling of the nation through the destruction of its infant males, met now with its appropriate punishment, in the blow by which in one night their own first-born were smitten of God. In the former plagues which had vexed the Egyptians, the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel dwelt, was preserved uninjured; but it appeared that God had so ordained this his tenth and last visitation, that unless the Israelites had protected themselves after a certain manner, in which they were instructed, their first-born also would have been involved in the universal destruction. And this he did, in order that by means of that ceremonial institution, which he appointed to preserve them, he might give them some intimation of the method in which the salvation of all them that are saved would finally be brought to pass: that when the time came, the true Israelites might recognise in their paschal lamb, and in its blood of sprinkling, the sacrifice of Christ, and keep the feast thenceforward according to its spiritual import, in remembrance of him.

The directions which the people received from

* Exod. xi. 2; xii. 35.

Moses, with respect to the means of averting the danger that hung over them, were to this effect:—On the tenth day of the month called Abib, thenceforward to be esteemed the first of their religious year, the head of every family was to select a lamb of a year old, pure and unblemished: he was to keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month, and then to kill it in the evening. Its blood was to be sprinkled on the two side-posts and upper door-posts of their houses, as a token to the destroyer; that he might pass over those houses on which the instituted sign was, and smite none within them. Its flesh they were to eat that same evening, with unleavened bread, and with bitter herbs; they were to let none of it remain until the morning; they were not to break a bone thereof. They were to eat it as men preparing to set off upon a journey, with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, their staff in their hand; and the circumstance of their bread being unleavened, which might seem to have been owing to the necessity of the case, which allowed them no time to leaven it, was not to be neglected in their future celebrations of it, (for they were to keep it a feast for ever,) but for seven days, beginning with that on which the lamb was slain, no leaven was to be found in their houses; the leaven being emblematical, as an apostle of Christ tells us, of malice and wickedness, and the unleavened bread, of sincerity and truth.* The children of Israel, being thus warned and instructed, did as Moses had enjoined them; and while each of them at the head of his family feasted in security upon the typical lamb, whose blood was his defence from evil, the Lord smote all the first-born of the Egyptians, from the first-born of Pharaoh, who sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon.

And the silence of midnight was broken by a great cry throughout the miserable land; and the king arose, and his subjects, in dismay and wretchedness, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. As eager as he had been before to retain God's people under his yoke, so was he now to dismiss them. The next morning they marched forth by the king's commandment, a very great multitude, being upwards of six hundred thousand that were grown up, besides children, and others not of their own nation, who followed their host. It was exactly four hundred and thirty years since the arrival of Abraham in Canaan, that his descendants set forth upon their journey towards that promised land; and within a few days, had God chosen to conduct them by the nearest way, they might have entered it; but he knew their hearts, and saw that they had not yet the firmness requisite to subdue the obstacles which the land of the Philistines presented; and, therefore, in order to habituate them still more to an unhesitating trust in him for protection in the worst of dangers, he led them by a road which brought them to the shore of the Red Sea. The manner in which he led them was of itself miraculous: they followed the guidance of a wondrous pillar, which was formed of cloud by day and of fire by night; and when they thus arrived at the sea, which opposed what must have appeared to them an impassable barrier against their onward march, they found to their dismay that the king of Egypt, repenting of his too great easiness in letting them go, had pursued after them, and had cut off their retreat by the way of the wilderness.

Their conduct upon this occasion showed plainly how unfit they were at this time to do the work of the Lord, by obtaining possession of Canaan against the will of its inhabitants: they were sore afraid; they cried out unto the Lord, not however, if we may

judge by their address to Moses, in any confidence of faith; for to him they said, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? for it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than to die in this wilderness."* Such is evermore the language of cold and worldly-minded men, who are lovers of the bondage in which sin keeps its servants, more than lovers of their deliverer and their God; who fear those that can harm the perishable body, and take no account of Him who made and can destroy both it and its surviving soul. Happy will they be, if they have among them a faithful monitor, who may keep them from thus turning back unto perdition; who may persuade them, as did Moses the Israelites, "not to fear," but to "stand still" in trusting veneration, "and see the salvation of the Lord." It was now drawing towards evening; and the people, somewhat reassured by the words of Moses, awaited the event in silence: then God began to fight for them; the pillar of the cloud, instead of appearing in their front, interposed itself between their army and that of the Egyptians, giving light to them as the night came on, but increasing the darkness to their enemies; and in its stead, a strong wind opened and marked out before them a path through the mighty waters. Into the midst of the sea they went, miraculously divided to give them passage, so as to form a wall on either side of them. The Egyptians, whose hearts were hardened to their own destruction, followed them into it; but their progress was one of confusion and difficulty; and when the last Israelite had reached the Arabian shore, the rod of

* Exod. xiv. 11, 12.

Moses was stretched forth by God's command ; and Pharaoh and all his host, already panic-struck, and desirous to escape by flight, were engulfed at once in the returning waters.* There escaped not so much as one of them ; and the bodies of the drowned, which were washed upon the beach, presented to the eyes of the astonished Israelites the only remaining tokens of their once dreaded foes. Then Moses composed and sang before the Lord a song of triumph and of prophecy, in which he celebrated the great deliverance so wonderfully granted to his people, who had been thus, as it were, baptized unto him in the cloud and in the sea,† and in which he foretold also the powerful effects of this tremendous judgment on the neighbouring nations of Edom, Moab, Palestine, and Canaan, the erection of the temple and sanctuary on the mountain of God's inheritance, and the perpetuity of his dominion and worship. And Miriam, also, his sister, she who had seen him long ago drawn forth a weeping infant from the waters of the Nile, and now beheld him come out of the divided sea, the guide and ruler under God of a rejoicing nation ; she also took up her song of triumph at the head of her countrywomen, with timbrels and with dances : " Sing ye to the Lord," was the burthen of their hymn, " for He hath triumphed gloriously ; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea."‡ After thus giving way to their feelings of pious exultation, they proceeded on their journey, through the arid wilderness of Shur, to Marah, where God showed Moses a tree of virtue to sweeten its bitter waters, and gave them a promise of health upon condition of obedience ; to Elim, where they encamped by its pleasant palm-trees, and its twelve wells of water ; and from thence into the wilderness of Sin, where their impatient spirit again

* Psalm cxxxvi. 15.

† 1 Cor. x. 2.

‡ Exod. xv. 21.

broke forth, and they murmured against their leaders for want of sufficient food. If the sinfulness of his people prevented the outpourings of God's mercy, how woful an estate were theirs ! But it is not so : even while we were sinners and enemies, God commended his love toward us, in that he sent us his Son from heaven.* An image and type of this inestimable gift, of which we were so utterly unworthy, is afforded us in the mode by which God appeased the clamorous cravings of the Israelites, when they murmured in the wilderness. He sent them bread from heaven, which represented in its strengthening effects upon the body, the spiritual refreshment which Christ bestoweth on the soul. This application of the manna as a type of Jesus is made upon his own authority, "The bread of God," said he, "is He that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. I am the bread of life : he that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."† These last words would lead us to expect that we should find Christ represented to us in these transactions in the wilderness by water as well as by bread. And this was actually the case, in the very next station, namely, Rephidim, where the Israelites halted ; there they were as much annoyed by the want of water, as they had been before by a deficiency of food ; and there God, looking with pity upon their irritable tempers, caused water to come forth out of a rock, when smitten by the rod of Moses. "And they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them," says St. Paul, "and that rock was Christ."‡ In his own person he was represented by the rock ; in the gifts and graces which flow from him, by the water issuing from the rock, and accom-

* Rom. v. 8, 10.

† John vi. 33, 35.

‡ 1 Cor. x. 4.

panying the Israelites in their subsequent wanderings through the wilderness. The manna, also, of which mention has been already made, continued to appear as a small, round, white substance, on the face of the ground, ready for their gathering, during the whole of the forty years which elapsed before their entrance into Canaan. Six days in every week they were allowed to gather it; but on the seventh day, those who went out to gather found none: on the sixth day there was always a sufficient supply afforded to sustain them during the morrow. And the reason of this was, that God had commanded the seventh or sabbath day to be kept holy, and gave them a clear proof how strictly it was his will that they should observe this, by rendering it unnecessary for them to labour even so far as to collect their ordinary food upon that day. While they were encamped at Rephidim, the Amalekites, a tribe descended from Esau, Israel's brother, disregarding or being ignorant of this bond of kindred, came and fought against them. Moses ordered Joshua, the son of Nun, an Ephraimite, a wise and valiant man, to lead some chosen troops against the enemy; while he, attended by Aaron and Hur, went up to the summit of the hill, holding the rod of God in his hand. As long as he was able to lift up this signal of encouragement to the people, they prevailed over Amalek; but when his hands grew weary, and he let it down, their spirits also sank, and they were on the point of being defeated; which Aaron and Hur perceiving, supported his hands till the going down of the sun; and the men of Israel, animated by the visible symbol of God's power, discomfited Amalek with the edge of the sword. From this we may learn how consolatory and strengthening to the soul it is, in whatever undertakings we engage, to feel that we are acting in the presence and with the approval of our God: if this be wanting, all is doubt, confusion,

and hesitation, and we flee defeated before our spiritual foes; but if we feel that our assailants are God's enemies also, with whom he hath sworn to have perpetual war, even Satan, and sin, and death, we may trust through faith to have the victory, and to triumph over them in Him.*

CHAP. XV.

THE GIVING OF THE LAW.

THE people of Israel, in their departure out of Egypt, had trusted themselves entirely to the guidance of Moses, being convinced, doubtless, by the many mighty works which they had seen him perform, that God was with him. Having no settled system of laws of their own, and no regular form of government, it was but natural, that, when any occasion of strife and controversy arose among them, rendering needful the interposition of a judge, they should have recourse to him as their leader, for his decision, and thus impose upon him a burthen too heavy for any one man to bear. He undertook the task, however, with readiness and good will, sitting to judge the people from morning unto evening. They were now drawing near to the mount Horeb or Sinai, in which God had formerly appeared to him as he fed the flock of Jethro; and though his continual occupations afforded him but little leisure to turn his thoughts to his own private affairs, we may yet reasonably suppose, that the aspect of this well-known country, in which he had sojourned for forty years, would recall to his remembrance his beloved wife and

* 2 Cor. ii. 14.

children, whom he had left there when he proceeded upon his perilous journey into Egypt. For although he who does the work of God, must never suffer those who are dearest to him upon earth, to interfere with its punctual and complete performance, yet he may rest assured, that He who planted those holy affections in his breast, never intended that he should rudely stifle them, or deny himself their moderate enjoyment: it is only he that loveth father, or mother, or wife, or children,* more than Christ, who is not worthy of him. Moses therefore went forth gladly to meet his father-in-law, who came, bringing him his wife Zipporah, and his sons Gershom and Eliezer,—and received with the respect due to its wisdom the advice which he gave him, not to weary himself out by the continual toil of judging every matter which the people brought before him, but to refer those which were of less importance than the rest, to the decision of certain grave and righteous men, whom he should appoint to that office. Still, though in this manner a form of government might be established, a regular system of law was wanting, according to which the governors might act. Moses indeed possessed the privilege of consulting God in every case of difficulty, but this was not so with the rest, and serious evils must soon have arisen, had things been long left in such a state. When, therefore, at the expiration of three months after quitting Egypt, they arrived at the foot of mount Sinai, God intimated to Moses his intention of taking the people under his own immediate governance, and of himself giving them a law. To this end, after keeping them for three days in a state of reverential preparation for his coming, the Lord descended in a cloud, accompanied by lightnings, thunderings, and a dreadful sound, as of the blast of a trumpet, upon the

* Matt. x. 37.

top of the mount: and from thence he uttered his voice, speaking to them what are called the ten words, or Decalogue, that is, the ten commandments: by which they were forbidden to have any other gods but him; to worship any graven image, or representation even of him; to take his holy name in vain, by perjury, or swearing, or irreverent speech; to do any work upon the Sabbath day; to treat with disrespect their father or mother; to commit murder, adultery, or theft; to bear false witness against any man, or to covet any thing that was his. These ten commandments God himself spake in the hearing of the people, and he added no more; these he himself wrote upon two tables of stone, and entrusted to the care of Moses; and from these peculiarities attending them, as well as from the character of their subject-matter, we believe that he intended them to remain in force as long as the world should endure, and to make them binding upon all people of the earth, to whom at any time the knowledge of them should be communicated, except in so far as any subsequent revelation should affect their observance; which has taken place, in some degree, with regard to the Sabbath, the rest of which is now transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week, by the authority of Christ's apostles, and is adapted, as to the manner of its observance, to the religion of Christ.* The people, awestruck by the terrible sight of the burning mountain,

* "If we consider advisedly, and soberly, of the Moral Law, or ten commandments, which God by the hand of Moses gave unto his people, it will appear, that such was his merciful providence in the choice of them, as, were there neither pain nor profit adjoined to the observing, or not observing of them; were there no divine power at all, nor any religion among men; yet, if we did not for our own sakes strive to observe these laws, all society of men, and all endeavours, all happiness and contentment in this life would be taken away, and every state and common-weal in the world fall to the ground and dissolve. Therefore these laws were not imposed as a burthen, but as a blessing: to the end that

and by the voice of God, besought him that in the further communications which he might have to make, he would speak to them by Moses : and this request the Lord, ever condescending to the infirmities of his creatures, was graciously pleased to grant. Moses accordingly—a splendid vision of God's glory having

the innocent might be defended, that every man might enjoy the fruits of his own travel, that right might be done to all men, from all men : that by Justice, Order, and Peace, we might live the lives of reasonable men, and not of beasts ; of free men, and not of slaves ; of civil men, and not of salvages. And hereof making our humane reason onely Judge, let us see the inconveniences in this life, which would follow by the breach and neglect of these Laws. As first, what would the issue be, if we acknowledged many gods ? would not a far greater hatred, warr, and bloodshed follow, than that which the difference of ceremony, and diversity of interpretation, hath already brought into the world, even among those nations which acknowledg one God, and one Christ ? And what could it profit mankind to pray to idols, and images of gold, metal, dead stones, and rotten wood, whence nothing can be hoped, but the loss of time, and an impossibility to receive thence-from, either help or comfort ? The breach of the third Commandment bringeth therewith this disadvantage, and ill to man, that whosoever taketh the name of God in vain, shall not at any time benefit himself by calling God to witness for him, when he may justly use his holy Name. The observing the Sabbath holy, giveth rest to men and beasts, and Nature herself requireth intermission from labour. If we despise our Parents, who have given us being, we thereby teach our children to scorn and neglect us, when our aged years require comfort and help at their hands. If murder were not forbidden, and severely punished, the race of mankind would be extinguished ; and whosoever would take the liberty to destroy others, giveth liberty to others to destroy himself. If adultery were lawful, and permitted, no man could say unto himself, this is my son : there would be no inheritance proper, no honour descend to posterity, no endeavour by vertue and undertaking to raise families ; murders and poisonings between man and wife would be daily committed ; and every man subject to most filthy and unclean diseases. If stealth and violent rapine were suffered, all mankind would shortly after perish, or live as the salvages, by roots and acorns. For no man laboureth, but to enjoy the fruits thereof. And such is the mischief of robbery, as where Moses, for lesser crimes, appointed restitution fourfold, policy of state, and necessity hath made it death. To permit false witnesses, is to take all men's lives and estates from them by corruption ; the wicked would swear against the vertuous ; the waster against the wealthy ; the

first been shown to a few chosen elders of the people, went up alone into the cloud which rested on the mountain, and remained there forty days and nights, unsupported by any food of man, living by the words which proceeded out of the mouth of God.* It was a miracle which represented that spiritual truth which Christ afterwards told his disciples,—“He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”† During this period he received from God that vast body of ordinances, of a judicial and ceremonial character, which form, in conjunction with the ten commandments, what usually is called the Mosaic law. The limit of these discourses does not allow me to enter into any detail of laws abounding in so many minute particulars: the great division of them into judicial and ceremonial has been already noticed; and each of these may perhaps be profitably again divided, into such as had a direct reference to

idle beggar and loiterer, against the careful and painful labourer; all trial of right were taken away, and Justice thereby banished out of the world. The coveting of that which belongs to other men, bringeth no other profit than a distraction of mind, with an inward vexation; for while we covet what appertains to others, we neglect our own; our appetites are therein fed with vain and fruitless hopes, so long as we do but covet; and if we do attain to the desire of the one, or the other, to wit, the wives, or goods of our neighbours; we can look for no other, but that ourselves shall also, either by theft or by strong hand, be deprived of our own. Wherein then appeareth the burthen of God's commandments, if there be nothing in them, but rules and directions for the general and particular good of all living? Surely, for our own good, and not in respect of himself, did the most merciful and provident God ordain them; without the observation of which, the virtues of heavenly bodies, the fertility of the earth, with all the blessings given us in this life, would be unto us altogether unprofitable, and of no use. For we should remain but in the state of brute beasts, if not in a far more unhappy condition.”—*Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World*. Book II. Chap. II. s. 15.

I have extracted at length this excellent chapter, breathing the spirit of true socialism, as an antidote to the pestilential trash with which, under the disguise of that respectable title, it is now attempted to corrupt the minds of the people.

* Deut. viii. 3. Matt. iv. 4.

† John vi. 35.

the land of Canaan, and such as had not. Of the former class, judicial laws relating to the land of Canaan, were those which regulated the amends to be paid in case of injury done to fields and vineyards, and forbade their possessors to glean them to the utmost—for the poor would never cease out of the land, and, while they remained, were cared for and protected by their God. Under this head may also be classed the law which provided for the redemption of alienated lands at the expiration of the fiftieth year, called the year of jubilee; the law of inheritance, the establishment of cities in various parts of the country for the habitation of the Levites, and the appointment of some as places of refuge for the man who unintentionally had slain his neighbour. The two latter ordinances were made indeed at a later period, but may conveniently be mentioned here. Of judicial laws, not referring specially to the land of Canaan, but operative wherever the Israelites might be, there are very many, of which the general object is the maintenance of strict justice between man and man, by the imposition of penalties according to the nature of the offence, by compelling restitution wherever possible, and by having recourse where practicable, to the principle of retaliation—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The people to whom they were addressed were a carnal and wayward race, who were only to be kept under control by the fear of sharp and certain punishments: yet as far as their hard hearts admitted, the exercise of charitable and kindly feelings was enjoined on them by God's law; they were taught to bring back their enemy's ox which they saw going astray, to return the poor man his garment which they had taken in pledge, to be hospitable to the stranger, to be kind to the fatherless and the widow, to love their neighbour as themselves, to be gentle and indulgent towards the animal creation. They

were taught also the useful lessons of temperance and chastity—the example of the heathen nations round about them was in these points most dangerous ; for they were given over to the vilest excesses and the worst abominations ; but God's people were not to be like them, but like him : “ Be ye holy,” was his express command, “ for I the Lord your God am holy.”*

And this brings us to the other great division of which this body of laws is capable, namely, to those ordinances which are called ceremonial, and the object of which was, to preserve in the strictest manner among God's people that outward purity and holiness which represents, and to a certain degree produces, a corresponding purification of the inward man, as also a precise observance of all the decencies of his public worship. I will take first that larger class of them which had no particular reference to the land of Canaan, and might be practised in the wilderness. To guard them against the loose and licentious manners of the heathen, with whom they might come in contact in their journeyings, strict injunctions were given them as to whom they might marry and whom not, and the propensity of their minds to indulgence in sensual pleasures was repressed by many wholesome prohibitions, and by the institution of a variety of forms of purification, of which the very irksomeness must have greatly tended to induce them to adopt habits of self-restraint. But besides this, as they had been accustomed to witness in Egypt, and wherever they went were sure to find, the idols of the heathen worshipped with all the pomps and ceremonies of an ingenious superstition, it seemed good to the Lord to protect them also against the danger of their being seduced thereby, and to this end to authorize and ordain a vast number of ceremonial acts, by means of

* Lev. xix. 2; xx. 7.

which he condescended to accept their worship. He appointed accordingly the place, the ministers, and the manner of that worship. The place was a holy tabernacle, which he commanded to be made of such materials, and so disposed, that although beautiful and magnificent while standing, it might easily be taken down and carried with them on their journeys: it was divided into two compartments, or rooms, the holy place, where stood an altar of incense, a golden candlestick of seven lamps, and a table on which loaves of bread were placed, and renewed every week; and beyond this the holy of holies, wherein was an ark of wood covered with gold, and on the top of it a mercy-seat of pure gold, overshadowed by two cherubim of the same metal, and constituting as it were a throne, on which the glory of God descended when he visited his habitation. The whole was surrounded by an extensive court, within which was the altar of burnt-offering, and the laver containing water for the purpose of washing.

The persons selected to minister in this tabernacle next claim our attention: to one tribe of the children of Israel, that namely of Levi, was this honourable office exclusively allotted: Aaron, the brother of Moses, was named to be its chief, and to his family the duties of the priesthood were confined; while the ministry of the remainder of the Levites was of an inferior character, consisting chiefly in the care and conveyance of the tabernacle and its vessels, while the priests took charge of the performance of the sacrifices, as well those that were offered up daily, as those that the people brought on particular occasions, either as testimonies of gratitude, or as atonements for sin; and on one day of the year only, the high priest went alone into the most holy place, and offered the blood of a victim before God, to atone generally for the sins, both of himself and of the

people. The vestments which he and his assistants were to wear, are also particularly enjoined, and an especial holiness required of him in his manner of life.

From what has been said it will appear, that the form of the tabernacle worship consisted chiefly in sacrifice, an institution of the earliest ages, and which probably owed its origin to God, but had at all events been accepted by him in the patriarchal times, and was now directly commanded by his law. The ceremonial duties which had reference to the land of Canaan, were principally those of observing three great festivals in the course of the year : the passover, the feast of weeks, fifty days after it, and the feast of tabernacles or ingathering towards the close of the year ; on which every male inhabitant of the country were ordered to go up to the place which God should choose for his especial habitation, with offerings according to their power, under a promise that while they were so engaged no enemy should invade their land. They were commanded also to leave the ground uncultivated every seventh year, which was called its Sabbath, an ordinance which no human lawgiver would have ventured to propose, but which served eminently to remind them that they were under the constant superintendence of a merciful God, who never would allow them to lack or suffer hunger, while putting their whole confidence in him. You have here, of necessity, but a very brief and imperfect sketch of that important institution, the law given to Moses, and one great end which it was designed to serve has not, as yet, been brought under your notice. "The law," says St. Paul to the Galatians, "was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ :"* and this in three ways :—First, by making such a public and authoritative declaration of the will of God, that until the coming

* Gal. iii. 24.

of his Son upon earth, the knowledge of it should be preserved in one nation at least, and thus a foundation laid, on which that gracious teacher might afterwards build up a more perfect system. Secondly, by making manifest that, however minute and imperative might be its ordinances, however terrible the consequences of disobedience, the knowledge of a law only was not enough for the well-being of man; that something more was needed to bring peace to his soul, and that secret of the Lord was to be found alone in the death of his blessed Son for every man, in the accepted propitiation and complete atonement made through the blood of Jesus. And in the third place, by letting it, when Christ came, be plainly seen, that many of its ceremonies for which it had been hard before to give any satisfactory reason, had been ordained as types and representatives of him—as shadows of things to come, of which the body was Christ: that He was the true victim, the true propitiatory, the true high-priest; that the most holy place wherein he offered his own blood was heaven, that by it alone, he only, and once for all, has sanctified his people. May we, when we read the law, implore and obtain from God a spirit of understanding, that we may perceive its hidden and spiritual, as well as its literal and outward meaning: remembering that our Saviour came not to destroy, but to enforce its moral commandments, and to fulfil the rest, by making in his own person that sufficient act of obedience and atonement which they were intended to foreshow; that he might make those who now and to all future ages believe and love him, a chosen and peculiar people, the real Israel of God.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XV.

CONTAINING

REFERENCES TO THE LAWS SPOKEN OF IN
THAT CHAPTER.

Judicial Laws, relating to the Land of Canaan. *Precepts of Charity, &c.* *Ceremonial Laws, relating to the Land of Canaan.*

- Exod. xxii. 5, 6.
 Lev. xix. 9, 10, 19, 23.
 Num. xxvii. 8.
 — xxxiv. 1—15.
 — xxxv. 1—34.
 — xxxvi. 1—9.
 Deut. xiii. 12—16.
 — xvi. 18.
 — xix. 1—13, 14.
 — xx. 5, 6.
 — xxiii. 24, 25.
 — xxiv. 19—21.
- Exod. xxii. 21—27, 30.
 — xxiii. 4—6, 9.
 — xxxiv. 26.
 Lev. xix. 9, 10, 13, 14, 15,
 18, 33, 36.
 — xxv. 35—55.
 Deut. x. 19.
 — xiv. 29.
 — xv. 1—18.
 — xx. 10, 19.
 — xxi. 10—17.
 — xxii. 1—4, 6, 7, 8.
 — xxiii. 15, 19, 23.
 — xxiv. 2, 5, 6, 10—13,
 14—22.
 — xxv. 4.
 — xxvii. 18, 19.
- Exod. xxii. 29.
 — xxiii. 10, 11, 14—19.
 — xxxiv. 18—26.
 Lev. xiv. 34—53.
 — xix. 19, 23—25.
 — xxiii. 4—21, 33—44.
 — xxv. 2—12.
 — xxvi. 1.
 — xxvii. 14—25, 30.
 Num. x. 9.
 — xv. 2—31.
 — xviii. 20—24.
 Deut. xii. 2—32.
 — xiv. 22—29.
 — xv. 19—23.
 — xvi. 1—17, 21.
 — xvii. 16, 18.
 — xviii. 1, 6, 9.
 — xx. 5.
 — xxi. 1—9.
 — xxii. 9, 10.
 — xxvi. 1—15.
 — xxvii. 4—8, 12, 13.
 — xxxi. 10—13.

Other Judicial Laws. *Precepts of Holiness.* *Other Ceremonial Laws*

- Exod. xxi. 1—36.
 — xxii. 1—20.
 Lev. xix. 20.
 — xx. 2—6, 9—18, 27.
 — xxi. 9.
 — xxiv. 14—16—22.
 Num. v. 6, 11—31.
 — xv. 30—32, 35.
 — xxxv. 16—27.
 Deut. xiii. 1—18.
 — xvi. 19.
 — xvii. 2—14.
 — xviii. 20.
 — xix. 11, 15, 16—21.
 — xxi. 15, 18—23.
 — xxii. 13—29.
 — xxiv. 7.
 — xxv. 1—3, 11, 13.
- Exod. xxii. 31.
 Lev. x. 9.
 — xi. 44.
 — xviii. 6—30.
 — xix. 2, 20—22, 29.
 — xx. 7, 10—26.
 — xxi. 7, 9, 14.
 Num. vi. 3.
 Deut. xvii. 17.
 — xviii. 13.
 — xxii. 30.
 — xxiii. 9, 17.
 — xxiv. 4.
 — xxvii. 20—23.
- Exod. xxii. 31.
 — xxiii. 19.
 — xxv.
 — xxvi.
 — xxvii.
 — xxviii.
 — xxix.
 — xxxi. 13—17.
 — xxxiv. 17, 21.
 — xxxv. 1—19.
 — xl. 1—15.
 Lev. i.
 — ii.
 — iii.
 — iv.
 — v.
 — vi.

Other Ceremonial Laws (continued).

Lev. vii. 1—34.	Lev. xxiii. 23—32.	Num. xxviii.
— xi.	— xxiv. 1—9.	— xxix.
— xii.	— xxvi. 1, 2.	— xxx.
— xiii.	— xxvii. 1—13, 26—29.	Deut. xiv. 21.
— xiv. 1—32.	Num. iii. 5—15, 40—51.	— xv. 19.
— xv.	— iv. 1—33.	— xvi. 22.
— xvi.	— v.	— xvii. 1.
— xvii.	— vi.	— xviii. 3—5.
— xviii.	— viii. 2, 6—19, 24—26.	— xxi. 12, 23.
— xix. 3, 4, 5—9, 19, 26	— ix. 1—14.	— xxii. 5, 11, 12.
— 28, 30, 31.	— x. 1—8.	— xxiii. 1—8—10—14,
— xx. 25.	— xv. 1—16, 22—31, 38.	18, 21—23.
— xxi. 1—8, 10—15, 23.	— xviii. 1—19, 26—32.	— xxiv. 1, 8.
— xxii.	— xix.	— xxv. 5—10.

CHAP. XVI.

THE WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS.

THE peculiar strictness of many of the laws which God delivered to Moses in the mount, has been accounted for by the consideration, that the people for whose use they were intended, were only to be governed by strictness, being of a self-willed and inconstant nature, unmindful of benefits, and ready to give way to carnal and idolatrous temptations. No stronger instance of such a character and propensity on their parts could possibly be afforded than the condition in which Moses found them, when, after an absence of forty days, he came again among them. Fancying themselves deserted by him, and totally disregarding the express command of God, that they should make them no graven image to worship it, they had compelled Aaron to use a portion of their ornaments in the formation of a golden calf, before which they reared up an altar, and sacrificed to it, and worshipped it, and said, "These

be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt."* Thus, as it is expressed by the Psalmist, "they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass"†—a sort of idol which doubtless it had occurred to them to make, in consequence of their having seen the living animal itself worshipped in Egypt. And as the heathens generally ended their sacrifices with a riotous festival, so likewise did they: "the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."‡ In the midst of this their idolatrous merriment, Moses came among them: his first impulse was one of zealous indignation, under which he cast out of his hands the two tables of stone which God had given him, and brake them upon the ground; his next, an exercise of rigid justice; for calling unto him the men of his own tribe, the sons of Levi, who probably had not joined the rest in their licentious conduct, he commissioned them to proceed through the camp, and inflict the punishment of death upon three thousand of the offenders; and lastly, moved by a spirit of tender affection for the endangered multitude, he returned unto the Lord, and humbly implored pardon for their sin, offering even himself to be blotted along with them out of God's book, if his intercession could not be accepted. God, assuring him that his principle of dealing with mankind was to punish the guilty, and the guilty alone, graciously condescended to pardon them at his request; and having delivered to his care new tables of stone, in place of those which had been broken, he favoured him also with a mysterious manifestation of some portion of his glory, and sent him down from the mountain with a face that shone with such extraordinary brightness, that, when he afterwards spake unto the people, he was forced

* Exod. xxxii. 4. † Psalm cvi. 20. ‡ Exod. xxxii. 6.

to cover it with a vail, taking it off only when he entered into the tabernacle, into the presence of God. This vail, as St. Paul assures us, was a type or image of the obscurity which hung over the whole dispensation of Moses's law, and which to this day is upon the hearts of the Jewish people, to be removed only by their conversion to the religion of Christ.* Let us thank God that we enjoy the benefits of that religion, and as we have received mercy, let us faint not, but renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, and walk as children of the light.

We have lately seen the people of Israel stripping themselves of their ornaments, and giving them to Aaron, to make them an idol : we shall now find them better employed in devoting a portion, and a large one, of their worldly wealth to the honour of the true God ; for out of the free-will offerings of the princes and the people it was that the tabernacle was framed, and furnished with all the costly vessels of its worship. Aaron himself, whose conduct on the former occasion had been weak and blamable, was now to undergo a heavy trial ; no sooner had he and his sons been consecrated to their new office of the priesthood, than two of them, Nadab and Abihu, departed from the strictness of God's regulations, and offering strange fire before him, which he commanded them not, were miraculously burnt to death in the very tabernacle : and their father, though deep indeed must have been his grief, sustained the blow with silent resignation to the will of God : an example to be followed by all of us, who meet with similar misfortunes, and who have yet surer grounds of consolation and hope afforded us than we can find vouchsafed to him, in the assurance of immortality and resurrection from the grave, through Jesus Christ our Lord. One

* 2 Cor. iii. 13-16.

other violent death, under special circumstances, took place during the abode of the Israelites at Sinai; the son of Shelomith, whose crime was uttering words of blasphemy against God, and whose sentence, declared by God to Moses, was to be stoned to death, a punishment which we find afterwards unjustly inflicted upon the first martyr Stephen, upon a false charge to the same effect.

The cloud which had now remained stationary for more than two years, again began to move. Their first resting-place was Taberah; there they complained, why we know not, and some of them were burnt by the fire of God, which was quenched at the prayer of Moses. At the next place, being already tired of the manna, or bread from heaven, which God gave them for their daily food, they tempted him in their hearts, "by desiring meat for their lust,"* and yet doubting the possibility of their obtaining it from him in the wilderness: "he gave them their desire," causing a vast flight of quails to light on the ground about the camp, so that they caught as many as they would; but while they were eating, he sent also a grievous plague, which destroyed many of them, and the name of the place was called Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people that lusted. Moses here obtained the sanction of God to be assisted, as his father-in-law had before advised him, by a chosen body of men, seventy in number, upon whom God vouchsafed to bestow a portion of the same spirit as that which enlightened him. And shortly afterwards, as if the management of an obstinate rebellious people was not burthen enough for him, he met with annoyance and opposition from his own family—Miriam and Aaron taking upon themselves to speak against him, because the woman whom he had married was not an Israelite. God however

* Psalm lxxviii. 18—29.

interposed in behalf of his meek servant, whom he declared to be "faithful in all his house;"* and having rebuked Aaron and Miriam for their presumption, punished the latter with the disease of leprosy, which was only removed at the intercession of Moses, after she had been shut out of the camp for seven days. Thus God enforced his law, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people,"† and Moses put in practice a precept afterwards enjoined by Christ, in praying for those who had despitely used him.‡ As they had now reached Kadesh Barnea, in the wilderness of Paran, which was on the borders of Canaan, twelve men were sent by God's command, one of each tribe, to search the land which they seemed now on the point of entering, and to bring back word as to its fruitfulness, and the number and strength of its inhabitants. This they did: they went through the land from one end to the other; they saw it and its people; and it might have been expected, as they went together, and saw the same things, that their reports would have agreed. But it was not so; ten of them disagreed from the other two, because they had gone forth in a different spirit; timid, and slothful, and putting no trust in God, they saw every thing in the worst light, and magnified every difficulty and danger to the utmost, till the plain and encouraging statement of the other two, Joshua and Caleb, who urged the people to enter immediately upon the promised possession, was disregarded by them, and they sat down and wept over the evil tidings which they were too ready to believe, and began to meditate a new rebellion, and a shameful return to slavery in Egypt. God thereupon being moved to wrath by this new

* Num. xii. 7. Heb. iii. 5. † Exod. xxii. 28. Acts xxiii. 5.

‡ Matt. v. 44.

provocation of the people, declared to Moses his solemn determination that they should not enter into his rest;* that, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb only, every one of them who was twenty years old and upwards, should die in the wilderness, in which the time of their wanderings should be prolonged to forty years : and as an immediate earnest of this heavy sentence, the ten men who had brought up that evil report of the land of Canaan, were cut off by a plague, and died there. The people, though naturally much grieved by this intelligence, yet seemingly thinking that God was fickle and inconstant as one of themselves, acknowledged indeed that they had done wrong, but became as obstinately bent upon entering into Canaan as they had before been afraid of doing so. They marched presumptuously, against the warning of Moses, up to the hill-top, and there encountering the enemy who opposed their passage, were shamefully put to flight, and driven back. So true it is, that boldness when we are not doing the will of God, is as great a folly as cowardice when we are. The next event which occurred during the Israelites' journeying in the wilderness, is as striking an instance of this as the foregoing. Korah, a Levite, and Dathan and Abiram, of the tribe of Reuben, thought fit to excite a tumult against Moses and Aaron: the former taking it amiss that the priesthood, which he thought should be common to all his tribe, should be confined to the family of Aaron; while the latter were indignant that the tribe of Reuben, the first-born of Israel, did not enjoy any rank or superiority on that account, but were forced to obey a Levite in the person of Moses. And how often are not those who should be brethren at the present day, prevented by groundless jealousies

* Psalm xcvi. 11. Heb. iv. 3.

of each other, and too high notions of their own importance, from working heartily together for the common good : how much of murmuring do we still see in many, at the lot which God has given them ; how much of unwillingness in the discharge of those plain duties which he has enjoined ; how much contempt of dignities ordained by him, and disobedience towards those who lawfully bear rule over mankind ! It is true that they who do so now, though they “perish,” it is to be feared, in the “gainsaying of Korah,” and have therefore a terrible account to render at the last day, die only the common death of all men, and are visited after the visitation of all : in the former time it was not so—God took a more summary and decided way of maintaining the authority of his servants—“the earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the congregation of Abiram ;”* they went down alive into the pit—Korah, and all who abetted him, with the exception of two hundred and fifty men only, who were consumed by fire ; and when the people who remained ventured to lay this destruction to the charge of Moses and Aaron in a reproachful manner, they also were afflicted by a tremendous plague, which carried off more than fourteen thousand of their number, and would have still continued its ravages, had not Aaron stood between the dead and the living, and made an atonement with incense, which was accepted by God. The same Being who, in these dreadful instances had established the authority of Aaron against all gainsayers, now thought fit to give a more mild and pleasing confirmation of his will in this particular, by commanding twelve rods, marked with the names of the chiefs of every tribe, to be laid up in the tabernacle, and causing that of Aaron alone to bud, and


* Psalm. cvi. 17.

bear blossoms, and almonds : which rod he ordered to be kept with the two tables of stone and the pot of manna in the ark, as a testimony unto them. But great and preeminent in his nation as Aaron was, he was nevertheless no better than a man, infirm and mortal. Soon after the death of his sister Miriam, when the weary pilgrimage of the people in the wilderness was drawing to its close, Aaron, conjointly with Moses, exhibited a proof how much of human weakness still claved to the most firmly assured faith in God, how fond man always is of intermingling something of his own invention with the things of God. The Israelites, after many wanderings, had again arrived at Kadesh, and suffering there for want of water, murmured as usual against their leaders, who were accordingly commanded by God to speak to the rock, receiving a promise that it would give forth its waters. Instead of this, they adopted a proceeding of their own, which consisted in Moses striking the rock twice with Aaron's rod ; and though the immediate effect was produced which they expected, yet the ultimate result was very different. God was displeased with them, and assured them that they should not bring his congregation into the land which he had given them. May we learn from this, to use our Lord's appointed means of grace, and not to seek, even in well doing, to walk after our own devices. The king of Edom having refused the Israelites a passage through his country, they were forced to make a considerable circuit to the eastward, and when they reached mount Hor, the sentence upon Aaron was put in execution, and he died on the top of that mountain, having been divested of his priestly garments by Moses, who put them upon Eleazar his son. In spite of the unfriendly conduct of the king of Edom, God had forbidden his people to meddle with him, or assail him, telling them that he had long

since given that land to the children of Esau for a possession, Edom, or Mount Seir, being the country of Esau, the elder brother of Jacob; but suffered them severely to resent and punish a similar act of opposition on the part of Arad, a Canaanitish prince. A singular event now occurred, at almost their last station in the wilderness: God being again provoked by their unseasonable complainings, sent fiery serpents among them, who bit many, and much people of Israel died. When they repented and cried for mercy, Moses was instructed to make a serpent of brass, and to set it on a pole; the effect of which was, that whoever had been bitten, and looked upon it, was healed and lived. An apt emblem of Him who was made sin for us, who, suspended upon the cross, overcame by death him who had the power of death, and became the author of eternal salvation, to all those who look upon him as their Redeemer with the eye of faith. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," saith St. John's gospel, "even so must the son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* When we feel the deadliness of the serpent's bite—the power of sin and death—let us flee to him for the healing of our souls as to a most sure and a most merciful Saviour—in all our dangers, and tribulations, and trials, let us look unto Jesus. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."†

* John iii. 14, 15.

† John iii. 17.




CHAP. XVII.

THE APPROACH TO CANAAN.

THE children of Israel, having now suffered to the full the heavy penalty of their former disobedience, by wandering in the wilderness until all that generation were utterly consumed which, being grown men, and therefore justly responsible for their conduct, had sinned against God, Moses, Joshua, and Caleb, only being left alive, were now permitted to leave it, and to enter again upon a land inhabited. The countries of Moab and Ammon, which nations were the descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew, they were forbidden to invade as enemies, though compelled to pass through a portion of the former. But the kingdoms of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon, and of Og, king of the rich pasture-land of Bashan, were given up to them for a prey: even of these, however, they only demanded a quiet passage through their territories; which being refused, they overthrew both of them in battle, and took possession of the whole of that district lying on the east of the river Jordan. Og, the king of Bashan, we are told, was of the remnant of the giants—he seems to have been a man of vast stature and of proportionable strength;* but what is any strength or power of man, when the hand of the Lord is gone out against him? the Israelites, whose fathers had shrunk back, trembling and discouraged, when they merely heard that there were giants in the land of Canaan, now readily encountered and easily vanquished this formidable

* Amos ii. 9

enemy, because adversity had taught them dependence upon God, and they felt that they were acting in accordance with his will. Resist your ghostly enemy in like manner, and he will flee from you; the God in whom you trust shall bruise him under your feet. The host of the Israelites had been forbidden by God to do any injury to the Moabites, in whose land they pitched their camp after their victories over Sihon and Og; Balak, however, the king of Moab, being ignorant of this, and entertaining a reasonable alarm at the appearance in his country of this vast multitude of warlike and victorious men, sought, in conjunction with his neighbours the Midianites, for some means of preventing the calamity which he feared was coming upon him. The means which he adopted were such as no one would think of having recourse to now, but were sufficiently in accordance with the superstitious spirit of those times, and consisted in his sending a message to Balaam of Pethor, a person who enjoyed the reputation of a prophet, inviting him to come to his assistance, and to curse the people of Israel. Doubtless the opinion was generally entertained among those idolatrous nations, that such a curse, solemnly pronounced in the name of their imaginary gods, would have the effect of weakening, or perhaps destroying in some wonderful manner, the people against whom it was directed: and therefore Balak, according to the imperfect light which he possessed, acted with no small degree of worldly wisdom; and he found in Balaam a man not by any means unwilling to second him in his project: but the scheme, however deeply laid, and promising in appearance, was all brought to a very different end from that which they looked for, by the interposition of God. He first appeared to Balaam in a dream, and forbade him to go with the messengers of Balak: that king, finding his first endeavour unsuccessful, renewed it with greater offers of honour



and reward: the avaricious mind of Balaam was not proof against these temptations; he loved the wages of unrighteousness; and having at last fancied that he had obtained the permission of God to do as he pleased, he set off with the full resolution of cursing his chosen people. This was indeed folly in the worldly wise man, near akin to what St. Peter has called it, "madness:"* it needed a severe rebuke, and it received one in a manner calculated to make an impression even upon him. When they came to a narrow part of the way, an angel of the Lord, with a drawn sword in his hand, was stationed there to withstand him. The prophet was unable at first to see this heavenly minister; but the ass on which he rode saw him, and after twice saving her master by turning aside out of the path, at last fell down under him, as the only means of hindering him from hurrying on to certain death. Balaam, inflamed with anger at this, smote the ass with a staff; and then it was that by a wonderful miracle, the dumb animal, "speaking with man's voice, rebuked the madness of the prophet," convincing him that its conduct could have proceeded from no ordinary cause: and what that cause was, God vouchsafed to explain to him, by opening his eyes, and showing him the armed angel, and assuring him that the sagacity and faithfulness of the poor animal which he had ungratefully smitten, had saved his life. Confounded and humiliated at this discovery, the prophet proceeded on his way, resolved no longer to disobey the commands of God, but to yield himself up submissively at least, if not cheerfully, to his guidance. Accordingly, though he went through, upon his arrival, the usual ceremonies of his idolatrous enchantments, and ascended up to a high place, from which he could see the armies of Israel, as if to curse

* 2 Pet. ii. 16,

them from thence, that which he uttered, to the astonishment and dismay of Balak, was, on three several occasions, no curse but a blessing—God so ruling it, that in spite of the evil intentions of these wicked men, nothing but good was spoken concerning his people : and in the last of Balaam's prophecies we have mention of some extraordinary personage, distinguished by the titles of a Star and Sceptre, who should arise out of Israel ; emblems of splendour and authority, attributable most fitly to our Saviour Christ, who is elsewhere called in Scripture, the “ bright and morning star,”* and the rod, or sceptre, proceeding out of the stem of Jesse.† That the heart of Balaam was still malignantly bent upon mischief against the Israelites, or at least that he was desirous of earning, if possible, the wages promised him by Balak, appears from the insidious counsel which he gave, that the women of Moab and Midian should be employed to seduce that people to commit acts of idolatry and wickedness, in the hope, no doubt, that so the favour of God would be withdrawn from them, and they would be easily subdued. This subtle device of his succeeded but too well. Many of the Israelites were tempted by these females to forbidden indulgences ; and had it not been for the bold zeal of Phinehas, Eleazar's son, who slew one of them, together with a prince of Israel, in the midst of their iniquity, a plague from God, which had begun among the people, would not have been so soon stayed—a plague which, during the time of its prevalence amongst them, and which seems to have been but one day, carried off no less than twenty and four thousand. Remember, that among the chief works of the devil, which you have promised to renounce at your baptism, are the lusts of the flesh : remember

* Rev. xii. 16.

† Isaiah xi. 1.

that they war against the soul, and do it far more lasting harm than any earthly enemy can do the body, and that they harm the body too, and, if not guarded against by prayer and watchfulness, will cause death, temporal and eternal.

God signified his approval of the act of Phinehas, promising to continue the priesthood in his family, and then commanded a chosen body of men to be sent out of the camp to punish the Midianites for having thus thrown a stumbling-block in the way of his people. This command they executed, slaying the grown-up portion of that nation, and among them Balaam himself, the treacherous author of that evil counsel, and returned, bringing with them the youthful maidens and a great spoil of flocks and herds, a portion of all which was solemnly consecrated to the Lord. They were now victorious over all their enemies, and had conquered a large extent of country; still this was not the land promised to their fathers, the land wherein Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had sojourned in old time: Canaan lay beyond the river Jordan, and they looked there for their place of final settlement and complete repose. A portion of them, however, namely, the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh, being more rich in cattle than their brethren, and finding the country of Sihon and Og particularly suited to the pastoral manner of life, obtained permission from Moses to take it for themselves, upon condition that they would go over Jordan to battle with the other tribes, and not return till they had seen them permanently established in possession of the land beyond it. First let us do our duty, and then we may enjoy with a safe conscience the good gifts of God. It could not be expected that Moses, who now saw the people whom he had led faithfully through so many dangers, on the point of entering

upon their promised inheritance, should not feel in his heart a strong desire to pass the Jordan with them; and we find, that, undiscouraged by the previous declaration of God, he ventured to approach him once more in prayer, entreating his permission to do so: he entreated it however in vain,—“Let it suffice thee,” was the Lord’s answer; “speak no more unto me of this matter.”* Moses, the meek and pious man, who knew and could practise, as well as Job, the maxim, “Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall not we receive evil?”†—if indeed it can be esteemed as evil to be called away, at the age of one hundred and twenty years, from the earthly Canaan to the real rest of God—betook himself calmly to what still remained of his commission, by giving a solemn charge of advice and encouragement to Joshua, who was ordained to succeed him in his important office, as a leader and commander of the people. His duty was to conduct them into Canaan, to fight at their head against its fierce inhabitants, and when they were overcome, to divide the possession of it in equal proportions among the tribes of Israel. After having fully explained this to him, Moses devoted the remainder of his life to a repetition of all the most important commandments of the law, with the addition of some new ordinances and declarations, amongst which we find a remarkable assurance, that at some future time God would raise

* Deut. iii. 26. Theodoret remarks upon this, that “God teaches us by it, how he requires perfection in his saints, not overlooking in them the sins which he bears with in those who have received less. And Moses was in this the type of the law which was given by him; Joshua, the type of Jesus. As Moses led the people out of Egypt, but Joshua into the promised land; so the law delivers those who obey it from the power of impiety, but the grace of the gospel leads them into the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.”—*Quest. on Deuteronomy xxxii.*

† Job ii. 10.

up to the children of Israel a prophet, of their brethren, like unto him, to whom it should be their duty to hearken:* an assurance fully made good to the Jewish people by the appearance of Jesus Christ among them; a prophet of their nation, equal in all respects, and in many superior to Moses, and to whom a voice from heaven bore witness, saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear him."† And at the time that this was said, namely, at his transfiguration, Moses himself, as if to call attention more strongly to the fulfilment of his prophecy, "appeared in glory, talking with him."‡ At this time also, Moses, foreseeing that the people would, after a while, adopt so far the customs of the neighbouring nations as to make themselves a king, delivered to them sundry precepts as to the manner in which, when chosen to rule over them, he should conduct himself, especially providing that he should write him out a copy of the law for his own use, that he might read therein all the days of his life: that he might learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of the law and its statutes, to do them: that his heart might not be lifted up above his brethren.§ You see here that the duty of the king is no other in this respect than the duty of all his subjects: you all have the book of God among you, to read, to hear, and to consider and meditate upon what it tells you for your certain good, and for your everlasting salvation: you have its commandments explained to you that you may do them, its promise held forth to you, that you may turn neither to the right hand nor to the left, from following them unto the end: may it be to you, who believe and love it, the book of life: may you learn from it the things belonging to your peace, and be happy in the know-

* Deut. xviii. 15.

† Luke ix. 35.

‡ Luke ix. 31. Matt. xvii. 3.

§ Deut. xvii. 19.

ledge and in the practice of righteousness, now and for ever. Moses knew what blessings were in store for the willing and obedient, and he declared them openly for the encouragement of all such : he knew also what curses would fall, even upon the heads of the chosen people, if they obstinately refused to walk in the ways of God's commandments, and these also he declared to them as openly : and in doing this, he entered into several minute and horrible particulars of their future sufferings, which were exactly brought to pass, when after they had rejected and crucified Christ, the Romans came and took away their place and nation. But though he thus faithfully showed them the dangers they would incur by disobedience, and did not disguise from them the evils which long afterwards they would have to undergo—his last words, nevertheless, were words of blessing : he went through their tribes in order, and addressed a comfortable word of prophecy to each, referring principally to their future situations and conditions in the land of promise, which they would long inhabit, enjoying the blessing, and safe under the protection of their God. Then having gone up into the mountain Nebo or Pisgah, from the top of which he was enabled to see a great portion of the land which he was forbidden to enter, this faithful servant of the Lord died, and was buried in an unknown grave, and was lamented for thirty days by the whole nation of Israel. When their mourning was over, by command of God given to Joshua, now become their leader, they began their march towards the land of Canaan, and soon arrived at the banks of the river Jordan, which was now more full than usual of water, being swollen, as was its wont at the beginning of spring, by the melting of the snow from off the mountains out of which it rises. But He who had divided the Red Sea into two parts, would not allow the progress of his people to be

checked by such an obstacle as this overflowing river presented: as soon as the feet of the priests, who bare the ark of the covenant, were dipped in the margin of the stream, the whole mass of waters, which were coming down, suddenly stopped; and, as those below continued to flow on, a sufficient space of ground was soon left dry, to admit of the passage of the whole people of Israel—who came across, bringing with them twelve stones taken out of the bed of the river, and afterwards set up by Joshua in Gilgal, as a memorial of that miraculous event. God had now made good the first part of his promise, by bringing them into the land of Canaan: and the wonderful manner in which he had done so, might well fill them with a confident hope that he would fulfil the latter part of it also, and, having driven out their enemies, would give it them as their inheritance. Let us take the present blessings of God, as an earnest of the still better things he has stored up for them that love him; and gladly let us say, “He who has given his own Son for us, shall he not with him freely give us all things?*

CHAP. XVIII.

THE PARTITION OF THE LAND.

NO sooner had Joshua conducted the people of Israel in safety over the Jordan, than, by command of God, he renewed the observation of two great religious ordinances, which during their wanderings in the wilderness had been disused among

* Rom. viii. 32.

them. These were, the ceremony of circumcision, and the festival of the passover: the first had probably been discontinued in the wilderness in consequence of the uncertainty they were under as to the time of their removals from place to place; and its omission led necessarily to that of the other, for no uncircumcised person was allowed to eat the passover; as in the christian church, those only who have been baptized are admitted to the supper of the Lord. It may at first sight appear strange, that, instead of marching at once against their enemies, and taking advantage of the alarm created by their miraculous passage of the Jordan, the people of Israel should have been thus commanded to remain for several days in a state of inactivity, and during the early part of them in a state of pain and suffering, which, had they been themselves attacked, would have prevented them from offering resistance. But this, probably, was designed to impress upon them, with still greater force, the assurance, that no harm could happen to them while they were engaged in a faithful fulfilment of the commands of God: for "when a man's ways please the Lord," as saith the proverb, "he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."* Let us remember this; let us reflect also, that a man's ways then especially please the Lord, when he is occupied in the sincere discharge of his religious duties; and never let us fancy that our worldly affairs can prosper better, if we give up to them the time which ought to be devoted to the worship of our Maker. "Them that honour me," saith the Lord Almighty, "I will honour."† "Whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God."‡

* Prov. xvi. 7.

† 1 Sam. ii. 30.

‡ Psalm l. 23.

But although God had engaged himself to afford his chosen people every degree of miraculous protection and assistance that was absolutely necessary for them, he never proceeded beyond this limit to supply them with any thing which, in the common course of natural events, they could obtain for themselves. As soon, therefore, as they had entered into the land where they were about to settle, and had begun to eat of its produce, the manna ceased: he still gave them, as he gives to all, their daily bread; but he gave it them no longer in an extraordinary manner. They were in possession of a portion of the open country, the plain of Jericho; but the city itself was barred against their entrance; none went out of it, and none came in. Joshua, using the common foresight of a sagacious leader, had already, while on the other side of the river, sent spies to examine the city, who had been hospitably entertained and concealed in the house of a woman named Rahab; she had also assisted them in their escape, and obtained from them a promise, that when the city afterwards should be taken, she and her family should be spared. Though all the inhabitants of Jericho were alarmed at the approach of Joshua, this woman alone turned her sense of its imminent danger to any good account: she believed what had been told her as to the former history of the Israelites, and she reasoned sensibly, and acted promptly, upon her belief; and therefore she is not condemned in the Scriptures as an example of treachery, but recorded with honour as an example of both faith and works. "By faith," says St. Paul, "Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."* "Was not Rahab," says St. James, "justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and

* Heb. xi. 31.

had sent them out another way?"* She believed in God, and she took the part that he took: let us do likewise, approving only those things, and con-sorting only with those persons, whom the Lord commendeth.

Joshua, when he sent out his spies to discover the strength of Jericho, imagined that he should have to use against it the arts of ordinary warfare, as the commander of God's host; but in a vision which he now saw, he was instructed that God's host had another Captain, even an unseen and heavenly Leader, under whose directions he was to proceed to the destruction of Jericho, in a peculiar and unheard-of manner. The manner was this:—for six days the whole army, instead of making any attack upon the city, marched in procession round it, following the ark and the priests, who blew with trumpets: on the seventh day, they did this seven times, and then the people, who had hitherto kept silence, shouted with a great shout, and the wall of the city fell down flat, and every man marching up straight before him, slew the astonished and confused inhabitants, Rahab only and her family being left alive. God had foretold this, and the people believed that so it would be; and therefore we are told that "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about seven days."† The city, and all that was in it, with the exception only of the gold and other metals, which were to be placed in the Lord's treasury, was doomed to complete destruction; and the curse of loss of children was pronounced against whosoever should venture to rebuild it: an event which actually came to pass, and met with its predicted punishment, after an interval of six hundred years.‡ Confident now of overcoming

* James ii. 25.

† Heb. xi. 30.

‡ 1 Kings xvi. 34.

all their enemies, the Israelites attacked the neighbouring city of Ai, and were beaten back, to their great dismay, though they lost only thirty-six men : Joshua entreated the Lord to make known to him the cause of this discomfiture, and was answered, that it was because some one of the people had secreted a part of the spoil, which ought to have been destroyed, or consecrated to God. Achan, the son of Zerah, was discovered to be the offender : after his punishment, for he was stoned to death, Ai was easily taken ; and the spoil thereof the people were permitted to take to themselves. God showed, by this example of Achan, what he afterwards declared by his apostle, that " a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump ; " * the sin of one man often affects the temporal well-being of many besides himself ; and if this be so even when it is kept secret from all but God, how much more when it is done openly and without shame, and finds others to imitate and applaud it ! He showed also his abhorrence of Achan's offences ; of covetousness, and of sacrilege, or the turning things holy to private uses ; offences which cannot therefore be too much dreaded and avoided by all who esteem themselves his people. The men of Gibeon, learning from the fate of Jericho and Ai how vain it was to fight against God's army, endeavoured to secure their own safety by a crafty device : they sent ambassadors, who, pretending that their city was at a great distance off, succeeded in making peace with Joshua and the chief men of Israel. The falsehood of their assertions was soon discovered ; but the princes, having sworn unto them, though deceived at the time, resolved to spare their lives, subjecting them however to perpetual servitude, as drawers of water and hewers of wood for the congregation of the Lord. They had

* 1 Cor. v. 6.

sworn unto their neighbour, and therefore they disappointed him not, though it was to their own hindrance.* But while the Gibeonites had been thus successful in obtaining safety for their lives from God's conscientious servants, a new danger began to threaten them from a different quarter. The kings of the neighbouring cities, hearing that they had made peace with Israel, resolved to prevent, if they could, the bad effects of their example, by punishing them severely for what they esteemed an act of cowardly submission: and this intention they would soon have executed, had not Joshua, by a hasty march, disappointed them of their prey, and compelled them to look rather to their own safety, than to the chastisement of others. On this day it was that God, even more remarkably than ever, showed himself on the side of Israel. He hurled down upon the Amorites great hailstones from heaven, so as to slay of them in this manner even more than the children of Israel slew with the sword: and when daylight enough did not remain to enable Joshua to complete his victory, he hearkened unto his voice, and caused the sun "to stand still in the midst of heaven, so that it hastened not to go down about a whole day."† That is, by a great miracle, the exact manner of which we cannot pretend to understand, the time of daylight was prolonged to twice its usual length, and thus full opportunity afforded the victorious Israelites to complete the destruction of their enemies. The five kings who had concealed themselves in a cave, were dragged out thence and put to death: their cities one after another were taken, and the inhabitants slain: a terrible example to all those who should hereafter live ungodly, seeing that it was not for the righteousness of Israel, nor for the uprightness of his heart, but for the

* Psalm xv. 5.

† Josh. x. 13.

wickedness of those nations, that the Lord God thus drove them out and destroyed them—a wickedness which, as he himself declared, existed so long before as the days of Abraham, though it was not then full. He might have destroyed them, had he so pleased by pestilences, by famines, or by earthquakes: but in commissioning one chosen people to punish them for their crimes, he marked more plainly his abhorrence for those crimes, showed that the event of battle and of all human policy was guided by his hand, and by making the Israelites an object of terror and aversion to the nations round about them, preserved them in a greater degree from the contagion of their bad examples, to which friendship and familiarity would have tended to expose them. The inhabitants of the land were far, however, from being utterly destroyed on the first entrance of the Israelites: God had said before, that he would drive them out by little and little, lest the beasts of the field should increase upon his people; and therefore many remained, probably the least wicked, and occupied strongholds, while a considerable portion of country near the sea was in possession of the Philistines, who were not of the race of Canaan, and therefore not devoted to the same ruin as the rest. Joshua, however, without taking account of these, divided the whole land into portions, according to the number of the tribes who were to inherit it; that is, the nine tribes, Judah, Simeon, Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Dan, and half of Manasseh; the other half of which, with Reuben and Gad, have been already mentioned as receiving their portion on the eastern side of Jordan. Of the distribution of these, it may be enough to say, that Judah and Simeon occupied the southern part of the country; Dan, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh, the middle parts; and Issachar, Zebulun, Naphtali, and Asher, were stationed in the north; which three

divisions answered pretty nearly to those which were called in after-times Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. Of these, the lot of the flourishing tribe of Judah was the largest, and contained within it the city of Jerusalem, then possessed by the Jebusites, but afterwards made the capital of the country. Hebron also, a most ancient and famous city, the abode of the giant children of Anak, who had so terrified the spies sent thither by Moses, was in the allotment of this tribe, and was specially bestowed by Joshua upon his zealous and faithful companion Caleb, who having before shown no fear of the sons of Anak, now begged permission to drive them out, and make their country his inheritance. The provision made for the tribe of Levi, according to the directions formerly given by Moses, consisted in forty-eight cities, with a certain portion of land round each of them, distributed among the allotments of the other tribes: six of these were called cities of refuge, in which any one who unintentionally had killed his neighbour, might shelter himself from the vengeance of those connected with him; and among them was Hebron, which Caleb having taken, made over to the priests, retaining only its fields and villages for his own possession. The land of Canaan being now conquered and divided, the two tribes and a half, whose portion was on the other side of the river Jordan, and who had crossed it in arms to help their brethren, obtained from Joshua permission to return. Before, however, they crossed the river, they did a thing which, at first, being misunderstood, created much indignation against them: they built an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to. The Israelites seem to have thought that this was an idolatrous altar, and showed a disposition to depart from the worship of God; and war was nearly being the consequence, had they not wisely first required and obtained the necessary explanation. The tribes

beyond Jordan had set it up as a memorial, to call to mind, in later times, that they were of the same original stock and religion as their brethren settled in Canaan; and when they heard that, they were content. How many quarrels and disputes, bringing with them the most deadly evils, might be prevented, if men would only act with the prudence of these Israelites, and learn first of all whether there is any real ground for them, or not. Half the wars which have desolated the world, and of the disagreements which have disturbed the peace of families and individuals, have arisen from some misunderstanding of each other's motives, which a little mutual explanation might have cleared up and put an end to; and both parties would have had cause to bless God, that they had not listened to the dictates of a causeless anger, and gone up to injure and annoy their brother. The work for which God had appointed Joshua to be the leader of his people was now completed: he lived the remainder of his days in peace, and died at a good old age. Before he died, he called the whole nation to witness that the promises of God towards them had been amply made good: he exhorted them to a becoming gratitude and obedience for the future; but did not disguise from them his fears, that they were not likely to maintain them with that undivided heart which he requireth of his servants. Whatever they might do, he told them, his resolution was fixed: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* Happy are the families where the resolution of Joshua is formed and acted upon, and seconded by every member of the same in his appointed station: happy are they who offer him not a lip worship only, and a constrained obedience, but who incline their heart unto him out of the fulness of sincere and grateful love, knowing that thus alone they can acceptably serve him.

* Josh. xxiv. 15.

CHAP. XIX.

THE TIMES OF ANARCHY.

AS long as Joshua lived, and those venerable elders who, under his command, had conducted the people of Israel into the land of promise, their authority and example were sufficient to preserve God's worship undefiled, and to enforce generally obedience to his statutes. So important to the religious and moral well-being of a nation is the good character of those who govern it; so wisely are Christians taught to pray "for kings and all that are in authority," not for the sake of those illustrious individuals only, but also for their own, that they "may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."* This truth has seldom been so distinctly shown as in the portion of Israelitish history on which we are now about to enter, immediately succeeding the death of Joshua, and most of his contemporary chiefs; when the people, feeling no longer the control exercised over them by these great and good men, and perceiving no one appointed directly by God to succeed them in their high office, lived in a state of wild and careless license, which soon degenerated into a forgetfulness of God, and an indulgence in the most insolent acts of injustice and wickedness. Living as we do in the habitual acknowledgment of a superintending Providence, and aware that our outward offences are at any moment liable to correction by those who administer our equal laws, it hardly ever enters into our contemplation what we should do, or what manner of men we should be, if these restraints were removed from us, and we were

* 1 Tim. ii. 2.

left to follow no directions but those of our own unbridled wills. Some notion of the evils and miseries, which would surely arise out of such a state of things, we may gain from observing the effects of a similar condition in the case of the people of Israel, when, having no regular authority to guide them, they began to do "every man that which was right in his own eyes."* We may take as our first instance, the conduct of a man named Micah, of the tribe of Ephraim, who though he did not appear to have cast off all recollection of the true God, or all desire to worship him, yet thought that he might do so after a fancy of his own, and in a manner consistent with the breach of some of his most direct commandments. The mixture of good and evil in his character appears in the first mention made of him, where we find him confessing to his mother, that he had robbed her of eleven hundred shekels of silver: there we see he had broken a commandment of the highest importance to mankind in their social state, "Thou shalt not steal." It is true he confessed his fault, being afraid of his mother's curse, and restored to her the money: so far he did well: but when she foolishly allowed him to keep it, the use he made of it was to break another of the ten commandments no less important to man's spiritual welfare—he made with the price of them a graven and a molten image, and set them up in his house. Besides the grave offence of worshipping images, he here committed another, in establishing a place of worship of his own; whereas God had commanded all the people to go up to worship at one particular place, namely, in those days, at Shiloh, where the tabernacle of the congregation had been erected, and the ark of the Lord was. One illegal and wicked action leads speedily to another. Having

* Judges xvii. 6; xxi. 25.

now an unauthorized object and place of worship, he stood in need of a priest ; and to this end he first consecrated his own son, an Ephraimite like himself, who had no pretensions whatever to an office, limited expressly by God to the tribe of Levi. That this was so he very well knew, and showed his knowledge by the eagerness with which he availed himself of the accidental arrival of a young man of that tribe, travelling about the country in search of occupation, and who readily accepted Micah's offer to hire him as his priest. The family of Aaron alone, of the tribe of Levi, had any right to act as priests : here, then, was another breach of God's ordinances, of which, however, Micah seemed to take no account whatever, but to consider himself in a high state of favour with God : " Now know I," said he, " that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest."* We may look with surprise at this man's blindness, in fancying that this little compliance of his with the will of God, would serve to make up to him for all the wickedness of his other actions in which he had followed no will but his own ; and while we do so, may not some of us need the rebuke of Christ— " Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye ?"† May we not look into our own lives for a counterpart ; not, indeed, to the precise actions, but to the principles upon which he acted ? Are we not too apt to pride ourselves upon something that we have done well, and which we think will surely procure for us the favour of our Lord, while all we have done ill, all our depraved thoughts, unholy wishes, and often worse than idle words, are passed over as things indifferent ? Is there not danger lest, while we thus are engaged in deceiving

* Judges xvii 13.

† Matt. vii. 3.



our own hearts, we should make our very religion vain? Nay, sometimes the mere being of a religion, the mere fact of our being Christians, we think enough: forgetful of the conditions which he who is a Christian engaged himself unto, in that baptismal sacrament which made him so; thinking only of the outward title, but regardless of the truth, that he who is indeed "Christ's, has crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts."*

Let us return now to the conclusion of Micah's history. Shortly after he had thus settled to his own satisfaction his religious affairs, a portion of the tribe of Dan, finding their own allotment of land too little for them, set forth with the lawless intent of seizing some other, no matter whose. Injustice is a sure consequence, when men do that which is right in their own eyes: and so Micah found it; as the children of Dan passed by his house, they learnt from some of their party, who had been there before, and hospitably entertained by him, that he had in it a graven image, and a Levite for his priest. Accordingly, they conceived the design of taking both of them away, and having promised advancement to the young Levite, they readily induced him to abandon Micah, and to take with him the images and other accompaniments of his unlawful worship. Micah pursued them with grievous, but unavailing complaints, against this act of robbery: "Let not thy voice be heard among us," was their stern reply to him, "lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household."† To this law of the strongest he was compelled to submit: he returned home, perhaps now reflecting that God's favour was not to be obtained by those who habitually despised his laws; while the men of Dan proceeded to their work of rapine and

* Gal. v. 24.

† Judges xviii. 25.

murder, which they executed upon a defenceless city at the extreme northern border of the land, whose inhabitants they destroyed, and naming it Dan, kept up there the idolatrous worship of Micah's images for many years, even as long as the house of God remained in Shiloh, that is, until the days of David.

The next transaction recorded as belonging to this dreary period, is one which shows upon a still larger scale, and with more terrible circumstances, the barbarity and licentiousness of the ungoverned Israelites. It took its rise in the city of Gibeah, belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. A Levite of Mount Ephraim, bringing home his wife, who had deserted him, but had become again reconciled to him, from the house of her father at Bethlehem, was forced on the approach of night to seek for shelter in Gibeah. Its inhabitants seem to have been savage and brutal in the highest degree:* no one offered the travellers admittance into their houses, a marked proof of want of hospitality in times when that virtue was of most common occurrence; and when they at last obtained a lodging from an Ephraimite, who chanced to be living there, the sanctity of his home was violated by the licentious multitude of the city, and his guest, to avoid worse treatment threatened against himself, was compelled to abandon the woman who had come thither under his protection, to be the victim of their barbarous abuse. In the morning, she was found lifeless at the threshold; and her husband, urged by an impulse of indignation, at which we cannot be surprised, sent her divided body to every tribe of Israel, appealing unto them for vengeance. The case was one of such atrocity, that even that debased and lawless people felt the necessity of punishing the guilty parties: but when they required the men of

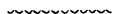
* Hosea ix. 9; x. 9.

Benjamin to give them up, that tribe refused, and chose rather to abide the result of war in the worst of quarrels, than to own themselves, in any degree, subject to the authority of the rest of the children of Israel. The feeling of partiality towards those of our own immediate family or kindred, which was the cause of this, shows itself most openly among uncivilized nations, but exists more or less in all; being in truth deeply rooted in man's nature, and calculated, if kept within due bounds, to supply, in default of better, a good inducement to action: it is liable, however, as in the case before us, to be grievously abused, and is then productive of the most disastrous consequences. We are all but too prone to overlook the faults of those most nearly connected with us, though we cannot injure them more than by so doing: to place them in situations for which they are unfit, though there again our conduct does them more harm than good; to take their part blindly and hastily against all the world, though for the most part we effect nothing but to involve ourselves in their offences, and in the consequences awaiting them. And so fared it with the men of Benjamin: they were successful indeed at first, having twice defeated the armies of Israel which came against them; but in the third battle, as God promised the Israelites by his priest Phinehas, who then stood before the ark after the death of his father Eleazar, they were utterly overthrown and routed, and the city of Gibeah, for the sake of which they had entered into this desperate warfare, was taken and destroyed. Thus much was due to justice, and was brought upon this haughty tribe as a fit punishment for the wickedness of some, and the obstinacy of all. But the fury of the Israelites, once aroused, did not stop here: they went on to indulge themselves in wanton cruelty, slaying and burning whatever

came in their way within the country of Benjamin ; so that only six hundred men, who had fled to a place of retreat in the mountains, were left alive. Then came, as generally it does when too late, remorse for their atrocious conduct—they “ lifted up their voices, and wept,”* and complained of the loss of their brethren unto God ; as if he, and not they, had brought about their destruction. Then they thought to make some reparation for what they had done, by procuring wives for the remnant of Benjamin, to whom they had sworn in their first wrath that they would not ever give their daughters : and this they effected in two ways, both savouring strongly of a barbarous state of society ; first, by destroying the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had neglected to come up to the general muster, and bestowing the women of that place upon the Benjamites ; and, secondly, a sufficient number being not so procured, by authorizing those who were still unprovided to lie in wait in the vineyards of Shiloh, and seize upon such young maidens as might be found there on a certain solemn occasion, engaged in the celebration of a festival. The tribe of Benjamin thus obtained continuance, and Israel was delivered, though at the expense of two cruel and little creditable expedients, from the consequences of its rash and unnecessary oath. It is painful and disgusting to wade through this mass of unmitigated wickedness, to see a whole people thus plunged into a demoralized condition, varied only by the occasional pre-eminence of some enormous crime ; but it is not without its use, if it teaches you to estimate man’s powers of self-control and self-government at their due value ; and gives you by the contrast a more clear notion of the great blessings of order, and of the absolute necessity which exists, that we

* Judges xxi. 2.

should always live, if we are desirous to be secure and happy, under the definite restraints of law, both civil and religious. Those among your fellow-creatures whose office it is to attend to your interests, whether temporal or spiritual, have a fair claim upon you in their turn for attention to what they say, and cooperation in what they do. They are the ministers of God to you for good ; and the laws which they enact, or the instructions which they give, are all subordinate to the great object of carrying out into full effect the intimations of his holy will, and the establishment of his authority and kingdom. May he grant to our lawgivers that they may in every instance have this end in view, and may their acts be such as lead towards it. May he enable the preachers of his word to avoid extravagance and error in its delivery, and to address it with effect to the understandings and to the hearts of men : may he thus show to all his people the things belonging to their peace, here and hereafter ; and give them that obedient, grateful, and trusting spirit, which makes every duty easy, and every burthen light ; that knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, which will make those things only right in their eyes, that are right also in the eyes of God.



CHAP. XX.

THE EARLIER JUDGES.

WE have seen that the people of Israel, when left to their own guidance, rapidly betook themselves to forbidden paths, and broke, as they fancied, with impunity, the laws of God. He indeed had

amply forewarned them, that if they acted thus perversely, the punishment due to their crimes would surely be brought upon them, and had especially pointed out the nations round about them, as being the instruments by whom, should they provoke him to such a course, he purposed to inflict it.* Their departure from him, as we see in the case of Micah and his image, consisted originally in a breach of the second commandment; the worship apparently was intended for him, but it was offered to him contrary to his express directions, as represented by an image. It appears, however, that having gone thus far, they did not long hesitate to go farther: they soon proceeded to violate his first and great commandment, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me;" seduced by the example of the heathens round about them, they worshipped their idols; and most fitly, therefore, was their chastisement brought about by means of those very heathens who had led them into sin. The first who brought them into slavery was the king of Mesopotamia, whom they served eight years. It behoves us, looking to this sad example, not only to keep ourselves from the gross act of worshipping an idol, as it is the image of some fancied god different from ours, to which, our God be thanked, we have no temptation as had the Jews; but also from whatsoever approaches and leads to it, such as is the worship of the true God under any visible representation, an error into which the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome has a strong tendency to lead the unwary. The children of Israel, while doing that which was right in their own eyes, had exercised all manner of violence and oppression upon one another, without provoking, except in one instance already mentioned, any great expression of

* Num. xxxiii. 55. Josh. xxiii. 13.

national feeling ; but when similar oppressions were inflicted upon them by the hand of a foreign tyrant, they began to implore the assistance of the God whom they had forsaken, to deliver them out of their distress. And, deeply undeserving as they were of such a mercy, they did not cry to him in vain : though he foresaw, that again and again they would prove ungrateful for his deliverances, and relapse into their old offences ; he nevertheless gave them that which they so earnestly desired—a respite from their present misery. God delighteth in prayer—it is at all times an acknowledgment of his superintending providence, an act of faith in one of his most blessed attributes, his everlasting mercy. He has commanded us to pray, and instructed us in the manner and matter of our prayers ; he has appointed his own Son to be the Mediator through whom they shall be acceptably presented before him, and has promised not to reject the humblest suppliant who thus comes to him in lowliness and sincerity of heart, and in full dependence upon him. God heard his people Israel, and gave them a deliverer, Othniel, the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb, who prevailed against their enemy, and restored them to a state of freedom. He was not a deliverer merely, he was also a judge ; what they needed was not absolute liberty to do what they thought good, a condition for which they had already showed themselves unfit, but a liberty to do all that a lawful and competent authority should pronounce conducive to their welfare. And such, to illustrate spiritual things by temporal, is the nature of our christian freedom ; we are “ not as without law, but under the law to Christ :” * he, like, but far above, the divinely appointed governors of Israel, is both our Saviour and our Judge ; he has obtained over us a

* 1 Cor. ix. 21.

complete authority, in that he has overthrown our ghostly enemy, and delivered us from the bondage of sin and death. The temporal judges of Israel, when they had done the will of God in their generations, died, and the people were left without a head; but Christ is the head of his church for ever—"death hath no dominion over him."* In entering further into the history of these judges, it will be proper to remark once for all, that, being mortal men, they retained and showed in their actions a large portion of human infirmity: God's Spirit was so far with them as to enable them to accomplish those special ends for which he raised them to their dignity and power; but we are not therefore to suppose, that every thing they did was done under his sanction, or is to be thought worthy of being imitated by us. An opportunity of applying this remark is afforded us by the conduct of the judge who comes next under our observation, Ehud, the Benjamite: that his general administration was that of a worthy and exemplary ruler, we may infer from the assurance, that the people did not do evil in the sight of the Lord until after his death:†—but the manner in which he began to deliver Israel, by stabbing the king of Moab at a private audience, we cannot look upon otherwise than with abhorrence as a treacherous murder. After Shamgar, the son of Anath, whose victories were over the Philistines in the southern parts of the land, the judge whom God raised up for the deliverance of Israel from Jabin the Canaanite, who oppressed them in the north, was Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth, a prophetess; at whose command Barak, with ten thousand men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, encountered and totally defeated Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army,

* Rom. vi. 9.

† Judges iv. 1.

and his nine hundred chariots of iron. The Kenites, descended from Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, in the line of Heber, were a wandering tribe, and at that time encamped near the scene of action: they were at peace with Jabin, and Sisera therefore fled from the battle to the protection of their tents. Jael, the wife of Heber, received, concealed him, and gave him food: and then, excited, we must suppose, by some over-ruling impulse from God, who had determined, and had previously declared, that he should fall by the hand of a woman, she put him to death as he slept, by striking the nail of the tent into his temples. For the assassination committed by Ehud before mentioned, we find no warrant in the words of Scripture; but with respect to Jael's act, it appears that Deborah, when she heard of the event, expressed herself in words of commendation, forming part of the triumphant song which she composed for the occasion—"Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent."* On this account I am disposed to ascribe her otherwise inexplicable conduct to a sudden impulse produced in her mind by the Almighty, which, for the moment, took from her all compassionate and womanly feeling, and converted her into the resolute performer of God's vengeance upon one whom he had doomed to death. It might also be designed to show the enemies of God, that even their imagined friends could be rendered in his hands the instruments of their destruction; and make them own, when their mightiest champion lay nailed to the earth at the feet of a feeble woman, that not only in the battle, but in the secret places of their retreat and refuge, the haters of his name were overtaken by his vengeance. A state of repose during forty

* Judges v. 24.

years followed this victory and the death of Sisera ; when the crimes of the people, being again renewed, brought down upon them their usual punishment. They who inflicted it in the present instance were the Midianites, a people who, having recovered from the severe blow received by them from the Israelites during the stay of the latter in the country of Moab, were now able, and well inclined, to revenge it upon them in their new possessions. They came accordingly, with a great host, augmented by the alliance of the Amalekites and some other neighbouring tribes, for several years successively, to lay waste the land of Israel, destroying the increase of the earth, and compelling the inhabitants to shun their fury by hiding themselves in the dens and caverns of the mountains. The consequence of these repeated invasions was, the affliction of a grievous famine, the same probably which induced Elimelech of Bethlehem-judah, with his wife Naomi, and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, to emigrate to the country of Moab, in order to avoid its evils ; intending doubtless to return to their own city when better times should come ; a resolution, however, which one of the four only, the widowed and childless Naomi, was enabled to accomplish. Those better times arrived, when God, having first severely rebuked the disobedience of his people by a prophet, determined to deliver them once more out of the hand of their enemies. The person whom he selected to do this was Gideon, son of Joash, the Abiezrite, of the tribe of Manasseh, who was engaged, when the angel of the Lord appeared to summon him to his task, in threshing wheat, not in the usual place, but by the wine-press, to hide it from the Midianites. With a mind humble as his occupation, he shrank back for a while from the responsibility ; nor was it until the messenger who addressed him had distinctly proved himself to be

from heaven, by performing the miracle of bringing fire out of the rock, that, feeling the full importance of his high commission, he set himself to perform it with the most active zeal. Knowing that it was the idolatries of his nation that principally caused their sufferings, he began by striking at this root of the evil ; he threw down the altar of Baal, and cut down his grove, and built an altar in their stead to the Lord God of Israel. Having set this example to his countrymen of freedom from spiritual slavery, he proceeded to excite them to take up arms in defence of their temporal liberties : he blew a trumpet in Abiezer, and at the head of those who gathered round him of his own and of the neighbouring tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, he went forth to encounter the Midianites, whose host was in the valley of Jezreel, amounting to an hundred and thirty-five thousand men. The whole force under the command of Gideon was thirty-two thousand only, an inequality of numbers sufficiently formidable to have induced any leader, not confident of the help of Heaven, to pause before he advanced against an enemy of such disproportioned strength. But Gideon had received from his God an assurance that he should save Israel out of the hand of the Midianites ; an assurance confirmed to him by a double sign : first, that of dew upon a fleece of wool, when there was none upon the ground about it ; and secondly, the reverse of this, dryness upon the fleece and dew upon the earth ; and therefore he not only marched cheerfully at the head of his small army, but continued with it when it was reduced, by God's direction, first to ten thousand, and afterwards to three hundred men.

While we are measuring the extent of our means, and doubting of their adequacy to the compassing of some righteous object, let us take encouragement from our recollection of God's dealings with Gideon

and his army. We may think them too few, while perhaps they may indeed be, as that army was, too many, if they hinder us from putting our whole trust in God. If we have good reason to believe that we are engaged in a work which he approves and requires at our hands, we may be sure that, out of our apparent weakness he will perfect but the more his strength; and, though not justified in neglecting the use of earthly means, we need not repine at their seeming deficiency, while our God worketh with us to will and to do. The maxim that "there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few,"* was indeed on this occasion most conspicuously illustrated; the whole enormous host of Midian, thrown into sudden confusion by an attack made on them in the dead of night, by the unexpected sound of three hundred trumpets, by the noise and glare, as each man broke his pitcher containing in it a lamp, and shouted "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon," began first to fight against each other, and then fled, in the hope of escaping to their own country, whither few of them ever returned. Their four princes, Oreb and Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna, fell beneath the sword of the conqueror, and "Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more."† The Israelites, anxious to show their gratitude to their deliverer, offered to make the office of chief ruler hereditary in his family. This, however, he piously refused, as inconsistent with the peculiar kind of government established for them by God; and having accepted from them a present from the spoils, of which he made an ephod, afterwards perverted to the purposes of idolatry, he returned to his own house, where he lived thenceforward, and died at a good old age.

* 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

† Judges viii. 28.

In this period of tranquillity, which lasted forty years, we may place the return of Naomi to Bethlehem, accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth, the Moabitess, the widow of her son, who, with the most touching fondness, had refused to be separated from her in her misfortunes. Compelled by poverty, when she arrived, to seek Naomi's subsistence and her own by gleaning in the field of Boaz, a wealthy landowner of Bethlehem, she not only was received by him with kindness and indulgence, but after a time became his wife; an exaltation which she richly deserved, by her quiet and amiable conduct, as well as by the affectionate spirit with which she had devoted herself to attend and support the bereaved and disconsolate Naomi. She is the second Gentile woman* of whom we find mention in the genealogy of our Saviour Christ—Rahab being the first, who saved the spies at Jericho, and married Salmon, the father of Boaz—mentioned, perhaps, to intimate that his redemption was for all; that the God, whose work he came to do on earth, was not the God of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles,† and has called the world, without distinction of sex, or rank, or condition, to the marriage supper of his Son.

CHAP. XXI.

THE LATER JUDGES.

WHEN Gideon refused, in behalf of his family, that hereditary authority over the children of Israel, which they in the first joy of their deliverance

* Mat. i. 5.

† Rom. iii. 29.

from Midian had rashly offered him, he little thought into what calamities, immediately after his death, that family would be plunged, owing to the inordinate thirst for power and supremacy displayed by one of its members. This person, Abimelech by name, who had not even the pretension to authority, in common with his brethren, of being the lawful offspring of Gideon, determined, by the perpetration of a most bloody action, to remove them all out of his way, and to present himself to the nation in the character of their great deliverer's only surviving son. To this end, having obtained the assistance of the men of Shechem, his mother's city, he laid violent hands upon the sons of Gideon, being threescore and ten persons, and slew them upon one stone, a single individual only, named Jotham, having escaped the general massacre. This person, though the youngest son of Gideon, appears to have been endowed with more quickness and sagacity than the rest: he not only saved his own life, but gave the men of Shechem some excellent advice in the shape of a parable, concerning the trees which chose a bramble for their king; under which image he exhibited to them their own folly in making choice of the base-born Abimelech, and the injurious consequence which would follow such an act. As he predicted, it speedily came to pass; Abimelech and the Shechemites soon began to suspect and hate each other; and the quarrel being fomented by another ambitious character, Gaal, the son of Ebed, after a time broke out into open war. So rarely is it that confederates in any great wickedness can long remain at friendship amongst themselves; the bad passions which at first brought them together for evil soon tend to disunite them, and to turn their enmity against each other: there is no real bond of peace but godly love and honesty; no true dependence to be placed on any,

but those who are actuated by sound religious principles, and show themselves to be so by their consistent conduct. Abimelech obtained the advantage over Gaal and the Shechemites, and pursued it with relentless vengeance, burning their city to the ground, and destroying its inhabitants: but when, elated with his success, he attempted to treat the tower of Thebez in a similar manner, he was cut off in the midst of his career by a stone thrown down upon him from its roof by the hand of a woman. During his short and disturbed reign, the idolatries suppressed in the days of Gideon began again to appear; nor was it likely that he, whose energies were devoted to the maintenance by force of that usurped authority which he had obtained by murder, would have either leisure or inclination to attend to the religion or morals of his people. The evil, once introduced, continued to increase in spite of the efforts of the two following judges, Tola and Jair; so that, in the days of the latter, or at least immediately after his death, the people seemed to have worshipped any of the gods of the neighbouring nations, rather than their own; and therefore their punishment, as had been the case in former instances of their misconduct, was inflicted on them by means of two of these nations, the Ammonites and the Philistines. The latter oppressed them in the western portions of their land, while the country to the east of the river Jordan was the principal scene of the devastations of the former. The misery they suffered produced its usual effect—remorse for their sins, and a temporary repentance, which God out of his great loving-kindness so far condescended to accept, as to afford them deliverance altogether out of the hand of the Ammonites, and to check by degrees, until at last he removed entirely, the domination of the Philistines. Against the Ammonites he raised up a man of Gilead, skilled in

warlike exploits, Jephtha by name, a man who, having lived an irregular life in his youth, and become an outcast from society, was now prevailed upon to take the command of an army, and march at its head against the king of Ammon. Before doing so, he attended to what he considered the demands both of justice and of piety: of justice, by endeavouring first to demonstrate to the king of Ammon the right which the children of Israel had to their possessions in Gilead, which they now claimed by a prescription of three hundred years; and of piety, by making a solemn vow to the Lord, that whatsoever thing or person he should first meet with on his return home should be devoted to him, either as, or with, a burnt-offering. After this he marched against the Ammonites, and God gave him a great victory over them, and they were driven out of the land of Israel. The first person whom he met with on his return to his house, was his beloved and only daughter: her, it is the opinion of many, he offered up in sacrifice in pursuance of his vow to God; while many also adopt the milder notion, that he merely set her apart by a solemn dedication to the Lord in a state of perpetual virginity: and his example in this latter point of view has been largely followed in the church of Christ, even in early times, and prevails to a great extent among those who embrace the Romish communion unto this day. The book of God records what Jephtha did, but makes no remark upon the propriety of his conduct; while in another portion of Scripture, the Epistle to the Hebrews, he is named without censure, and admitted into the catalogue of those ancient worthies, whose deeds were done in faith.* On these grounds, I am myself inclined to admit the more humane construction of the passage,

* Heb. xi. 32.

which many scholars of eminence have thought reconcilable with the words in which it is expressed: he might even then have been rash in vowing as he did, seeing that he cut off by it the continuance of his name and family; and perhaps the actual coming to pass of this consequence of his vow was a sufficient punishment for its rashness. One vow and promise there is, which we all of us have made, and by which we all are strictly bound in the sight of God; it was first made at our baptism, many of us have already solemnly renewed it in our own persons at the time of our confirmation, and those who have not will shortly do so. This vow it should be the great study and duty of our lives to keep and perform to the utmost, through the help of God: it is one out of the observance of which no evil consequences can possibly arise, but pure and certain good now and hereafter: its completion will not be a thing to be lamented, like Jephtha's, but an occasion of great joy; for then will be heard the words of our gracious Master, saying, to the everlasting comfort of those whom he addresses, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."*

The great and decisive success which Jephtha had gained over the Ammonites, ought to have obtained for him the general approbation and gratitude of his countrymen; in the minds of the men of Ephraim, however, it seems only to have excited a mean spirit of jealousy, which induced them to take up arms against him, because he had not invited them to go with him to the battle against the common enemy. Jephtha denied the truth of their accusation, and rebuked them in his turn for neglecting his summons; and the dispute, running too high to be put an end to by argument, was settled by the sword: the

* Matt. xxv. 21.

Ephraimites were totally defeated, and many of them attempting to cross the fords of Jordan in the possession of the Gileadites, were detected by their inability to pronounce the word Shibboleth, and cruelly put to death. Jephtha after this judged Israel for six years, and was succeeded by three judges, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, of whose administration nothing memorable is recorded. After the death of the last of these, the government of Israel became vested in Eli, the high-priest; subordinate, however, to the authority of the princes of the Philistines, into whose hands the nation had been delivered for its sins. But as it seemed good to their gracious Lord, that this state of subjection to their enemies should after a while come to an end, two children were born about the same time, the one in the tribe of Dan, the other in that of Levi, through whose means the yoke was at first loosened, and afterwards finally shaken off from the necks of his people. The birth of each of them was attended with extraordinary circumstances of a somewhat similar character, and both were devoted, from their earliest infancy, to the service of God, Samson's duties calling him to the camp, and those of Samuel to the tabernacle. The birth of Samson was announced by an angel to his mother, who had long been without children, and afterwards to his father Manoah: that of Samuel was granted to the ardent prayers of his mother Hannah, who was likewise childless, supported by the intercession of Eli in her behalf, who, when the child was of a sufficient age, took it, agreeably to its mother's vow, under his care, and caused it to minister in one of the subordinate offices of the house of God. It is recorded of this high-priest and judge of Israel, that he sullied the conclusion of a long life, by suffering his authority over the people to be exercised by his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who showed themselves

in every way unworthy of the trust, and dishonoured their office as priests, and the house of God in which they ministered, by the commission of most shameful acts of oppression and licentiousness. Their vile conduct came to the ears of Eli, and though he remonstrated with them, he restrained them not: he suffered the indulgent feelings of a father to prevail over the plain demands of duty, as the ruler and protector of those who also were his family—the people of God committed to his care. Therefore, first by the mouth of a prophet, and afterwards by a communication made to the youthful Samuel, as he slept in the tabernacle, God declared to Eli his purpose to chastise him, by the utter ruin of his house, and by transferring the priesthood to the other branch of the family of Aaron. Let this example teach us the necessity of diligently watching over the conduct of our children, and suffering no feelings of misplaced affection to prevent us from correcting them when they do amiss: let us remark, that where we have the power to check them, and neglect to use it, we become responsible for the harm they do to themselves and to society: and that unlimited indulgence is no proof of love, but rather of the contrary; for, as saith the proverb, “he that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him by times.”* From the time that Samuel received this first communication concerning Eli, God continued to reveal himself to him upon various occasions, so that, as he grew up, he became established in the honourable office of a prophet of the Lord. And the same Spirit which enlightened him, seems also to have actuated his fellow-countryman Samson, though in a different manner: without notably influencing his moral character, it excited him to deeds of great

* Prov. xiii. 24.

physical strength, and manly daring; through its impulses he overcame a lion at Timnath, and slew a thousand Philistines, armed only with the jaw-bone of an ass; he tore out of the ground the gates of Gaza, where his enemies imagined they had securely shut him in, and carried them up to the top of the hill that is before Hebron; and, as the last action of a life spent in doing harm to the oppressors of his country, he pulled down upon them and upon himself the house of Dagon, in which they had assembled on the occasion of a festival, and whither they had caused him to be brought as their captive to make them sport. Acts like these, tending to weaken the enemies of Israel, he was miraculously enabled to do: in so far as he was left to his own guidance, he showed evident marks of a hot and hasty temper, and a proneness to the love of women, which caused him to contract many discreditable alliances and intimacies with the daughters of the heathen; and was at last the occasion of his destruction, by leading him to confess to the deceitful Delilah, whose treachery had three times been made apparent to him, the secret of his great strength, which lay in the seven locks of his hair, kept uncut from his childhood upwards, in pursuance of his Nazarite vow. Great as was his power and might, and much as he did for Israel, he was not gifted with the grace of self-restraint, with a meek, or continent, or sober mind: we must take heed that we are not led away by admiration of his brilliant acts to a liking for his vices. He found it easier to slay a thousand men, than to resist the blandishments of one treacherous woman; let us be warned by his example, to oppose the most guarded resistance to those sins which do most easily beset us: let us remember that "he who ruleth his spirit, is better than he that taketh a city;"*

* Prov. xvi. 32.

let us look rather to our weakness with humility than to our strength with pride : let us listen to him who tells us, " Let not the mighty man glory in his might,—but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth : for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."*


CHAP. XXII.

SAMUEL, THE LAST JUDGE.

THE great destruction which Samson had caused among the Philistines, by that last exertion of his renewed strength, which brought down upon them and upon himself their idol temple, seems to have emboldened the Israelites to make a fresh effort for the recovery of their freedom. They made it, however, without any previous consultation of God, and met with the reward of their rashness in a defeat, which caused them the loss of four thousand of their number. Desirous of providing against the recurrence of such a disaster, they bethought themselves of a method of securing success to their arms, which never had been practised since they entered the land of Canaan. They sent for the ark of God from Shiloh to their camp ; and thus strengthened, as they fancied, by his presence among them, they again assailed their enemies, who, though at first confounded by this unusual proceeding of the Israelites, had yet spirit enough left to abide the encounter. The men of Israel, on this occasion, met with the

* Jer. ix. 23, 24.

usual fate of those who proceed in matters appertaining to God by ways of their own, which he has not appointed; they were utterly routed, and overthrown, and the ark of the Lord, in which, without any authority from him, they had superstitiously put their trust, was taken by the Philistines. A man who escaped from the battle, and fled to Shiloh, brought these heavy tidings to Eli, who, blind and aged, sat by the gate of the city, anxiously waiting for intelligence, and doubtless oppressed in spirit by sad forebodings, which the prophetic assurance of ruin to his house could not but cause him to entertain. The defeat of Israel, the death of his two sons Hophni and Phinehas, were indeed grievous tidings, but being in some degree expected, were borne by him with comparative composure; but when the messenger added that the ark of God was taken, the old man's strength of mind and body at once gave way; he fell backwards to the ground, and the fall dislocating his neck, he also died on the same day that the glory had departed from Israel. But while God thus severely punished his own people, and taught them how vain it was to put their trust in the visible symbols of his presence while they neglected *him*, he exacted for those symbols the utmost reverence from the heathen conquerors into whose power they had fallen. The Philistines had placed the ark for safe custody in Dagon's temple at Ashdod: the next morning they found the statue of their god—a monstrous image, with the head and body of a man, but resembling a fish at its lower extremity—fallen upon the ground before it. Thinking perhaps that this was accidental, they took up the statue, and set it in its place again; but the next day it had not only again fallen to the ground, but its head and both its hands were stricken off upon the threshold: a manifest token, that where God is, no other pretender to



divinity can be permitted to abide; an emblematical assurance, that He whose throne is on the mercy seat, will make his enemies his footstool—will bruise Satan under his feet. Nor was this the only way in which God showed, that even his seeming weakness was stronger than man, or the vain objects of man's worship: whithersoever the captive ark was conveyed in the country of the Philistines, (for the inhabitants of Ashdod were soon compelled, by the infliction of a painful disease, to send it away from them,) the same disease attended its removals; until, by the unanimous consent of the nation, it was restored again to the people of Israel, accompanied by a trespass offering, and wonderfully reconveyed, against the order of nature, by two kine which had lately calved; and who, although their calves were shut up at home, went straight onward, with no man to drive them, until they entered the border of Israel, at the city of Bethshemesh. The men of Bethshemesh, out of curiosity perhaps to ascertain whether the Philistines had taken out the contents of the ark, or actuated by a profane desire to see and handle what they knew to be forbidden, ventured to look into it; but their presumption was instantly punished by the loss of many of their lives, and, in their alarm, they requested their neighbours of Kiriath-jearim to undertake its custody; who took upon themselves that honourable office, and faithfully and reverently discharged it for many years. We may learn from this, the danger to our souls of too curiously and rashly prying into the mysterious and deep things of God: in so far as they are plainly revealed to us, let them be to us the subject of joyous gratitude, and of devout thanksgiving; in so far as they are still hidden from us, let us await the time of their further revelation with patient and submissive awe. Many things are far beyond our comprehension now, but nothing absolutely needful is so: let us be

content with this assurance, and pass the time of our sojourning here in preparation for that future state of being, in which "we shall know, even as we are known."

For twenty years after the restoration of the ark, the nation seems to have remained in a state of torpid submission to the authority of the Philistines: at the expiration of that period, some symptoms of returning animation began to appear among them; and Samuel eagerly availed himself of their improved disposition, by exhorting them to put away their remaining idolatries, and to prepare their hearts unto the Lord to serve him only, assuring them that, if they did so, he would deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. Thus encouraged, they assembled at Mizpeh, and kept a solemn day of fasting and humiliation: the Philistines, hearing of their assemblage, came down in order to disperse it; but God heard the prayers of Samuel, and, seconding the brave resistance of his people by a storm of thunder, caused them to obtain a great victory over their enemies, who, during the remainder of Samuel's government, were confined to their own territories, and entered no more within the border of Israel. On this occasion, Samuel solemnly acknowledged him to whom the victory was due, by setting up a stone, and calling it "Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us:"* and well would it be for christian nations, if they more frequently and more zealously implored his help, and owned it more gratefully when given; well would it be for christian men, if they watched more constantly unto prayer, for each other, and for themselves, and continued in the same with more heartfelt thanksgiving. The period of peace which succeeded this deliverance was devoted by Samuel to the diligent administration of justice: he went year by year in a

* 1 Sam. vii. 12.

circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel at all those places: a practice which, with great and evident advantage, has been adopted in our country also, where a similar circuit is performed by the Queen's judges twice in every year, and the inconvenience and expense of removing all causes and trials to the capital city, is greatly lessened, if not altogether avoided. As long as Samuel was able to do this in his own person, things went well; but when the approaching infirmities of age induced him to admit his sons as partners in his authority, their conduct, very unlike that of their father, for they perverted judgment and took bribes, produced naturally dissatisfaction among the people. And being in this state, they did what a dissatisfied people is very apt to do; they required not only a reform in the administration of the government, but a change in the very nature of the government itself: they came unto Samuel, and said, "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways; make us a king to judge us."* There were in this request three faults: first, as has already been noticed, they demanded an unnecessary alteration; secondly, they demanded it in order to be more like the nations round about them, whose manners and customs they had been forbidden to imitate; and thirdly, in so doing, they threw off their peculiar allegiance to God, who had hitherto been in a special manner their king, and chose rather to make flesh their arm, than to trust in his divine protection, which had been extended over them in a variety of marvellous instances, from the time that they came forth out of Egypt unto that very day. It was no proof that God was not displeased with them upon this occasion, that he thought fit to grant their prayer; as he said long afterwards by the prophet

* 1 Sam. viii. 5.

Hosea, he "gave them a king in his anger," as well as "took him away in his wrath :"^{*} for they who ask for unreasonable and injurious things, are oftentimes most fitly punished by receiving them, and are filled with the bitter fruits of their own devices. Neither can any man complain, who has attended in any degree to religious instruction, that he did not know what would be hurtful to him, and what would not: if he did not, he might have known it—God has declared it openly and sufficiently in his word, and calls upon all to whom that word is offered, to learn of him the way to real happiness, the things belonging to their lasting peace. What he does now generally, he did then specially for his people Israel: Samuel was commanded to tell them, in plain language, the miseries and oppressions which they would bring upon themselves, by thus setting up over them a human governor, full of human passions and vices, and armed with that nearly unlimited power over their lives and fortunes, with which the kings of the heathen then lorded it over their subjects. Thus, if they still asked to be so governed, they asked it with their eyes open, with a fair and full knowledge of the consequences that would arise: they seem even to have meditated their future subjection to an arbitrary despot, as a relief from the constant duty of watching over their daily conduct, left to no external control but the divine law. They said, "Nay, but we will have a king over us."[†] Upon this, God gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations; still reserving to himself, however, the privilege, which indeed they were disposed to concede to him, of appointing them their king. One of the motives which induced them to apply for him at this particular time was, the fear that

^{*} Hos. xiii. 11.

[†] 1 Sam. viii. 19.

Nahash, king of the Ammonites, was coming to make war upon them : God therefore so far condescended to their wishes, as to choose them out a man whose lofty stature and personal courage fitted him for the rude duty of heading them in battle, Saul by name, the son of Kish, of the warrior tribe of Benjamin. This young man, having been sent with a servant to seek his father's asses, which were strayed, came, among other places, to Samuel's residence, who received him honourably, and, before his departure, informed him that he was authorized by God to anoint him king over Israel ; which ceremony he immediately performed, and sent him home, filled for the time with a spirit of prophecy, and disposed to receive with reverence the high commission which the Lord willed him to discharge. Accordingly, though he attended the great assembly of the nation, at which the choice of a king was to be made known, a becoming feeling of modesty kept him in a place of concealment, until, being discovered, he was brought forth and placed in the midst of them, overtopping them all from the shoulders upwards, and commanding that involuntary homage which is in almost all cases paid by the crowd to personal strength and beauty. A few indeed, self-willed and rebellious men, despised him, and doubted his ability to save them : but the people generally were well content ; and his first action, namely, the rescue of Jabesh-gilead from the assault of the Ammonites, being attended with complete success, confirmed his authority beyond dispute over the whole Israelitish nation. Nor was it more the skill and valour which he showed in the defence of his country, than the merciful moderation with which he treated those, who before his victory had rejected him with contempt, that raised his character among his subjects. Samuel, for a time at least, had reason to comfort himself with the reflection, that God, in

giving such a ruler to his people, had treated them more mildly than they deserved: though he felt it his duty to give them again a solemn warning to continue in obedience to the laws of God, being well aware of the terrible calamities that would befall both them and their sovereign, should they cease to do so. He acted upon the principle of that most true saying, "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people;"* a saying which the whole history of the Israelites abundantly illustrates, and which both the governors and the governed, in every country where the superintending providence of God is acknowledged, will do well to bear in mind. The Captain of our salvation, who watches over us from heaven, is King of kings and Lord of lords: all earthly power in christian countries is held subordinate to his, and is bound to provide, as his delegate, for the spiritual as well as temporal welfare of its subjects, and the maintenance of his visible church. Over hearts He alone can rule who sees them, but outward actions may be controlled to habits of decency, and religious institutions may be framed upon principles of regularity and order: the people may be instructed in the good and right way; and the sure guide of the erring may be entreated with national as well as individual supplication, to keep them in it unto the end.

CHAP. XXIII.

SAUL, THE FIRST KING.

SAUL, having begun his reign beneficially to his country by a great defeat of the Ammonites, sought further that renown which arises from suc-

* Prov. xiv. 34.

cessful enterprise, by turning his arms against its old enemies, the Philistines. He did so, however, without sufficiently calculating his own strength, and consequently brought down upon the land of Israel a host whose ravages he was unable to check. Being in this strait, and having waited seven days in vain for the arrival of Samuel to countenance his proceedings, he took upon himself to offer a burnt offering, by which he hoped to procure the favour of God. Samuel, on his arrival, rebuked him sharply, as he deserved, for his impatience, and undue interference with the office of others; and warned him that he had forfeited thereby the continuance of his kingdom. "Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God;"* as no one is excused for neglecting his own business, so no one is justified in presumptuously intruding into that which is clearly set apart as the business of another. The kings of Israel, for instance, great as was the extent of their authority, were invariably forbidden to execute the office of its priests; and upon the same principle it is, that our Church pronounces in her thirty-seventh article, that "we give not to our princes the ministering either of God's word or of the sacraments; but that only prerogative, which we see to have been given always to all godly princes in holy Scriptures by God himself, that is, that they should rule all states and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be ecclesiastical or temporal, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil doers." The deliverance of the Israelites out of the dangerous position in which Saul had placed them, was brought about by a most bold action on the part of Jonathan his son, who, attended only by a single follower, climbed up the hill on which their troops were stationed, slew twenty men at his first onset, and struck such a terror into the whole army,

* 1 Cor. vii. 24.

that they fled in confusion, and would have been utterly destroyed, had not Saul rashly bound the people by an oath, that they would taste no food that day, while the pursuit lasted; the consequence of which was, that they became faint, and were unable to follow up their retreating enemies. This shows how foolish it is to bind oneself or others to any particular course of conduct, until we have maturely considered the results which are likely to arise from it, lest, like Saul, we defeat our own purposes, by the very means which we adopt in order to bring them to a successful issue. Jonathan alone, who had not heard of the oath imposed by his father upon the people, tasted a little honey, which he found in a wood: and when afterwards God, being consulted by Saul, refused to answer, the king, supposing that some one had broken his oath, caused inquiry to be made; and Jonathan's action being thus discovered, he was condemned to death, which sentence would have been inflicted upon him, had not the people in a body interfered in his behalf, and declared that not a hair of *his* head should fall to the ground, who "had wrought with God this great salvation in Israel."* Had it not been for this outbreak of popular feeling, another consequence of Saul's hasty conduct would have been the death of his son, who had gotten him the victory. Although perhaps, in strictness, the people had no right thus to controvert the sentence pronounced by their king, it would appear that they took a sounder view than he of the point at issue; and that theirs was in this instance, the voice of good sense and humanity—preferring mercy to sacrifice, and instructing him in that which he should have known before, that no engagement can be binding, which involves the shedding of innocent blood. Saul

* 1 Sam. xiv. 45

however, as his whole conduct shows, was a man little disposed to abide long by any good counsel, or to follow the guidance of any will but his own. Being commanded by God to execute vengeance upon the Amalekites, who, ever since the coming forth out of Egypt, had been the determined enemies of Israel, he performed the commandment indeed, but in a manner of his own devising; sparing the life of their king and bringing with him all the chief of the spoil, which he ought to have utterly destroyed. And so confident was he that in thus doing he had performed his duty, that he boasted of it to Samuel, whom he met on his return. When asked to explain how it happened that all those flocks and herds, which should not have been left alive, were still bleating and lowing in the camp, he meanly endeavoured to throw the blame upon the people, who, as he said, had reserved them to do sacrifice to the Lord. But "Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."* The only sacrifice completely acceptable to God, is a sacrifice of the whole will and affections, the surrender of the whole inward and outward man, to do his holy pleasure;† that only sacrifice was made on our behalf, when Jesus offered up himself; and all that we do in presenting our bodies living and reasonable sacrifices to our God is done through him, by his Spirit that dwelleth in us.‡ Saul, finding his excuses set at nought, and alarmed at discovering himself the object of God's just displeasure, endeavoured to obtain the mediation of Samuel; and laying hold of his garment to detain him as he departed, caused in it a rent—of which the prophet instantly

* 1 Sam. xv. 22

† Psalm xl. 6—8.

‡ Heb. vii. 27; x. 5—14.

availed himself to proclaim to him his doom. "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou."* Thus God, though rejected by the folly of Israel from reigning over them as their immediate king, still held and exercised the prerogative of deposing, if he saw fit, those princes who transgressed against him, and of transferring their royal authority to whom he would. And having now determined upon a successor to Saul, a man after his own heart, he forthwith commissioned Samuel to anoint him for his office. Samuel thereupon proceeded to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse, the grandson of Boaz and Ruth; and having caused his sons to pass successively before him, fixed, by God's instruction, upon David, the eighth and youngest, as the future ruler of Israel. The Lord looked not upon outward beauty, though in this the young man was not deficient, but on the heart of him whom he was about to raise to this high station of dignity and power: it was there he sought for kingly qualities, and finding them under a shepherd's garb, he caused the anointing oil of gladness to be poured on his young brow, and shed upon him largely that of which it was a type, the free spirit of great deeds, and strong desire of excellence—a spirit which enabled him to cope with the lion and the bear in the wilderness—a spirit which sent him forth, when next the Philistines were gathered together against Israel, to encounter their mightiest champion, Goliath of Gath, at whose vast stature and insulting words the best of Saul's warriors trembled. Strong in faith, and confident of victory, he went forth under the protection of the blessed Lord, "who taught his hands to war, and his fingers to fight:"† rejecting the defence of Saul's massive armour, pro-

* 1 Sam. xv. 28.

† Psalm cxlv. 1.

vided only with his pastoral weapons, a sling and a stone, he prevailed over his gigantic enemy, and slew him, and struck off his head with his own sword: for "he called," as we read in Ecclesiasticus, "upon the most high God : and he gave him strength in his right hand to slay that mighty warrior, and set up the horn of his people."*

Being thus introduced to the notice of Saul, he became attached to his person as one of his confidential servants; and though a mean spirit of jealousy was soon awakened in the breast of the king, because the women who celebrated their respective praises ascribed to him the destruction of ten thousands, and to Saul of thousands only, he rendered himself generally beloved among the people and the inhabitants of the palace, and especially by Jonathan, with whom he formed a tender and lasting friendship. Saul had promised his daughter to the man who should kill Goliath : Merab, however, his eldest, he gave to another ; and the hand of Michal was only granted to David, upon the condition that he should previously destroy a certain number of the Philistines—a condition imposed upon him by the king, in hope that he would perish in the attempt. Frustrated in this, and being now under the influence of an evil spirit, he made two attempts to slay David, as he was playing on the harp before him with a view to lessen his disease ; and these also having failed, he sent messengers to his house in order to put him to death, a fate from which he was rescued by the timely warning of his wife Michal, who assisted him in making his escape. Jonathan also laboured, but in vain, to reconcile his stern father to the innocent object of his hatred; and it was not until he had hazarded his own life also in this friendly endeavour, that in an interview with David, who lay hid in the


* Ecclus. xlvii. 5.

neighbourhood, he finally counselled him to depart to a greater distance, and asked only in return that a similar kindness should be showed hereafter by David, when in power, towards his family. David took leave of this tried friend with tears; and having, as he passed by the city of the priests, obtained from Ahimelech the high priest the sword of Goliath, and the only food he had to offer him, namely, the loaves of shew-bread which had just been taken from the Lord's table, he quitted his own country, and took refuge with Achish, the king of Gath. This bold step was attended with the consequences which might have been expected: the servants of Achish called upon their lord to take notice, that this David was the man whose chief praise in his own country had been, that he had slain his ten thousands of their people; and David was fain therefore to avoid their vengeance, by making himself appear a poor miserable idiot, deserving rather their pity than their resentment, and by escaping at the first convenient opportunity into a cave at Adullam. There, being within the land of Israel, he became again liable to the persecutions of Saul; and had the additional mortification of learning that the kindness of the high priest towards him had cost that venerable man his life, and the lives of the priests his family, owing to the malicious information of Doeg, the Edomite, who, having been at Nob when David came there, and having witnessed his reception, reported it to Saul. One son of Ahimelech alone, Abiathar by name, escaped the slaughter of his brethren, and fled to David, bringing with him the ephod, or priestly garment, by means of which the Lord was wont to give answers to those who consulted him in times of difficulty: the possession of this ephod became thenceforward an important advantage to David, enabling him to learn beforehand the designs of Saul, and easily to baffle them. Thus God

makes many things, which appear at first sight most grievous evils, work for good to those who are his servants : the murder of the priests, causing as it did unfeigned sorrow to David, placed in his hands the oracle of God, and ensured his own safety for the future. Put your trust in that God, and believe always that even in his most afflictive dispensations he thinks upon you in mercy.

About this time Samuel the prophet died ; and Saul having lost the means of consulting God, could only discover David's places of retreat from the information of those who thought to ingratiate themselves with him by communicating it. Twice, however, while pursuing him among the mountains, he himself was at the mercy of David, who might, without difficulty, have slain him. On the first occasion, that forbearing and forgiving man, reverencing in his unjust persecutor the Lord's anointed, contented himself with cutting off the skirt of his robe, and on the second, with taking away his spear, and the cruse of water which stood at his head as he slept. The fierceness of Saul was not altogether proof against these marked acts of good returned for evil ; for the moment, but for the moment only, he felt remorse for his conduct, and promised to do him harm no more. David, however, was too cautious to trust to these appearances of an altered disposition : he judged it safer to depart again into the country of the Philistines, taking with him the two wives whom he had married upon Michal's being given to Phalti, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail, the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, whose readiness and sagacity had saved him from embruuing his hands in the blood of her churlish husband, when he had insulted him during his sojourn in the wilderness. Achish, who now perceived that David was indeed treated as an enemy by Saul, received him more graciously than

before, gave him the city Ziklag to dwell in, and summoned him to attend at a great mustering of the Philistines, preparatory to an invasion of the land of Israel. With this summons, David, though doubtless loth to turn his arms against his countrymen, thought it his duty to comply, but was relieved from his embarrassment by the princes of the Philistines, who, fearing lest he should turn against them in the battle, refused to have him in their army. He therefore returned home ; while Saul, desirous of learning what should befall him, consulted a woman who had a familiar spirit at Endor, desiring that Samuel might be called up to speak with him. Samuel himself, by permission of the Almighty, did actually appear, (an event probably little contemplated by the sorceress who had invoked him,) and warned the terrified monarch of his approaching doom : " To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me ; the Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines."* This prophecy was fulfilled—the men of Israel were defeated, Saul's three sons were slain, and he himself being wounded, rather than fall into the hands of his enemies, pierced himself with his own sword, and died. He had been king over Israel for twenty years, but had latterly had little comfort in his kingdom ; he felt that he lay under the displeasure of God, and that his own family were on friendly terms with the man whom he most feared and hated—the man who, being better than he, was destined to succeed to that authority which he had forfeited by folly and disobedience—"the man after God's own heart, whom the Lord had commanded to be captain over his people."†



* 1 Sam. xxviii. 19.

† Ibid xiii. 14.

CHAP. XXIV.

THE REIGN OF DAVID.—PART I.

HE IS THE TOWER OF SALVATION FOR HIS KING: AND SHEWETH
MERCY TO HIS ANOINTED, UNTO DAVID, AND TO HIS SEED FOR
EVERMORE.

THE words prefixed to this chapter are part of a psalm, or song of thanksgiving, which David is said to have spoken unto the Lord in the day that the Lord delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul.* It is probable, therefore, that he composed it during the period of his residence at Ziklag, where he dwelt in security from his formidable enemy, until the day when Saul fell in Gilboa. By a merciful providence of God, David had been permitted to quit the army of the Philistines, before that battle took place, in such a manner, that, while he had no share in the defeat of Israel, or the death of Saul, he had yet honourably performed his engagements towards his protector, and temporary sovereign, the king of Gath. Nor was this the only advantage that he reaped, by returning home at that precise moment: on his arrival he found Ziklag in flames, and his wives and all the families of his followers had been carried away captives by a band of plundering Amalekites. His soldiers, of less disciplined minds than he, abandoned themselves to the wild impulses of grief and anger, and even spake of stoning him; while David, knowing where his real strength lay, encouraged himself both under his own loss and against the fury of his followers, in the Lord his God. A weak man, under such circumstances, would have bemoaned his misfortune, but done nothing

* 2 Sam. xxii. 51; Psalm xviii. 50.

to repair it: a bold but worldly man would have pursued instantly the retreating enemy: but David was religious as well as decided in disposition, and the course which he adopted was to ask counsel of God. The holy ephod, in the custody of Abiathar, afforded him the means of doing this: and God answered him, "Pursue, for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all."* Thus encouraged, he set forth on a pursuit so rapid, that a third part of his little force were compelled by fatigue to halt at the brook Bosor; the rest, guided by a slave of the Amalekites, whom they found abandoned in the field, overtook and routed them, and recovered the captives and the spoil, of which latter he equitably allowed those to take an equal share, who had stayed behind out of actual inability, and with no unwillingness to proceed. For motives and intentions, so far as we can judge of them, should always be taken into consideration by us, and allowed all reasonable weight in determining the value of conduct: if there be a willing mind, it should be accepted according to that which a man hath, and not according to that which he hath not. Two days after David's return to Ziklag, a messenger arrived there with the news of Saul's defeat and death in Mount Gilboa; who, however, not content with relating the latter circumstance as it happened, chose to affirm that he himself had put the king to death, at his own request, to prevent him from falling into the hands of the Philistines. This falsehood, which he doubtless thought would render him acceptable to David, cost him his life: David commanded him to be put to death, for having dared, under any circumstances, to lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed; whose fall, and that of the beloved Jonathan, he bewailed in a pathetic dirge, or

* 1 Sam. xxx. 8.

funeral hymn, admirably expressive of his feelings, who mourned at once the loss of his friend, and the degradation of his country. And now, the time being come when his faith was to be rewarded, he went up, having first consulted God, out of the country of the Philistines to Hebron in Judah, his own tribe, which speedily rallied round him, and anointed him to be their king. Their example was not followed by the rest of Israel; Abner, the kinsman of Saul, having taken under his protection his son Ishbosheth, and caused him to reign in Mahanaim beyond the Jordan. For two years this state of things continued without disturbance: then Abner went forth against Judah, and Joab, David's general, met him at the pool of Gibeon, and gained over him a victory attended with little loss but that of his own brother Asael, who, being swift of foot, and confident in his own valour, pursued Abner so long and perseveringly, that he at length fell by his hand. Joab, a man of a stern and relentless temper, determined to revenge himself for this; and when Abner, having quarrelled with Ishbosheth, came over with a view of tendering his services to David, Joab, under pretence of talking with him privately, led him aside by the gate, and stabbed him, so that he died on the spot. David showed his abhorrence of this deed, by ordering a magnificent funeral for Abner; which he himself attended, and pronounced an oration in honour of his memory, as well as a solemn declaration, that the guilt of this transaction was to be laid solely upon the head of Joab, whose power however was so great, that he did not venture to punish him himself. Shortly afterwards, he showed more decisively that he would not countenance secret assassination, however much the act itself might be to his own worldly advantage. Two men murdered Ishbosheth in his palace, and fled to David for protection and reward: these received

from him the only reward which their foul treason merited, an immediate execution : he reminded them what he had done to the Amalekite, who said he had killed Saul, though at his own request, and to save him from insult ; and showed them how much more a like fate was due to them, who had slain a righteous person in his own house, upon his bed. The death of Ishbosheth having taken away his only competitor for the throne, he was presently after acknowledged, by the unanimous voice of the nation, king over Israel, in the thirtieth year of his age ; — a time of life in which men are most fit for active enterprises, and when the fire of youth begins to be controlled by the prudence which, under God, is necessary for the successful issue of all great undertakings. That of David was to free his country altogether from the power of foreigners ; and his first successful step towards it, was the capture of the strong hold of Zion, till then in the possession of the Jebusites. There he took up his own abode, and built himself a house in it, and called it the city of David : but while he did this, he was not unmindful of Him to whom he owed the kingdom ; but calling a solemn council of his great men, proposed to them to bring up from Kiriath-jearim, where it had remained since the days of Samuel, the ark of God to Jerusalem. This resolution they put in practice ; though in consequence of the rashness of Uzzah, in venturing to touch it, a profanation which God punished by instant death, a delay of three months took place, during which it remained in the house of Obed-edom, and blessed him by its presence. David observing this, took courage to remove it further to his own city, paying it every possible demonstration of honour, and himself laying aside his usual dress, and girded with a linen ephod, danced before it. Michal his wife saw him thus, as she fancied, demean himself, and despised him in her heart, and told

him what she thought; but he maintained that he had done well—that no dishonour attached to him for the performance of this sacred ceremony, and that even if there did, he could never sufficiently abase himself before God, who had regarded his low and humble condition, and raised him to the illustrious eminence which he then enjoyed. Having showed in this manner that he possessed in a very remarkable degree the graces of humility and reverence for sacred things, an occasion speedily presented itself for declaring also his unlimited submission to the will of God, in a matter on which he had set his heart, but in which he was forbidden to indulge his liberal feelings. The ark of God had been brought to Jerusalem, and placed within a tent, because there was no house there worthy to receive it as a permanent place of habitation: this deficiency it was the anxious desire of David to supply, by building for it a temple, in some degree suitable to the majesty of the Godhead which condescended to abide thereon. Having communicated his purpose to the prophet Nathan, he received at first every encouragement; but shortly afterwards the word of the Lord came to Nathan by night, commanding him to tell David, that it was not his will that the pious design should be at that time put in execution; his own reign had been, and was still to be, too much disturbed by deeds of war and bloodshed, to render this work, peculiarly one of peace, acceptable to God from him. Lest, however, he should suppose that his intentions were altogether frustrated, he was assured that his son, hereafter to be born, would be such a person as God would approve in the discharge of that important duty; a son, indeed, whom God himself would own peculiarly for his, showing him thereby to be typical of that greater than Solomon, who should hereafter glorify his Father in heaven, by building up to him in the hearts of his

disciples the nobler temple of the Christian Church. Resigned to the ordinance of God, and comforted by his promise, David betook himself to that portion of his religious duties which it was allowed him to discharge: he made ample preparations for the intended work, and in the mean time arranged and set in order the courses of the priests, and of the other subordinate ministers in the service of God; being of the opinion which wise and religious men have at all times adopted, that the solemn worship of God should not be left to chance, or the fancy of the moment, but should be performed according to well digested rules, with decency and even splendour; to assist in which he composed also, by the Spirit of God, many excellent psalms, suitable to the public service of the temple, and which, spiritually understood, are most valuable accompaniments to our christian worship. For many of David's psalms do not only speak of the Messiah to come, but are actually so written as if he himself were speaking; they are composed in his person; Christ in them at one while offers praise and prayer to his Father, at another addresses himself to men, and, as he did during his sojourning upon earth, declares his own sufferings, and the glory that should follow. Having thus, in a manner worthy of his high station, consulted the spiritual welfare of his people, David proceeded to discharge that other portion of the kingly office, which consists in promoting their temporal advancement, for which his active habits and courageous temper especially qualified him. All the nations around him, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians of Zobah, the Amalekites, and the children of Ammon, were successively compelled to acknowledge not only the independence, but the supremacy of Israel: while, as if to show how compatible with each other are the extremes of worldly grandeur and spiritual abasement, the victorious

monarch, who had subdued so many enemies, became suddenly unable to subdue his own lusts, and gave himself over for a time to be the servant of sin. The beauty of Bathsheba, wife of one of his chief captains, Uriah the Hittite, allured him to desire her for himself; and to compass this unlawful end, he did not hesitate to bring about, in a most base and treacherous manner, the death of his faithful servant; causing him to be placed in the front of the battle, and giving secret orders to his officers to desert him there, so that he might be slain. Thus it is that one sin, wilfully indulged in, leads but too often to another of a still more abominable character. David, beginning his breach of the law of God by coveting his neighbour's wife, soon went on to the commission of the grievous offences of adultery and murder, and for a time he appeared to enjoy unmolested the fruits of his wickedness. But he was not a hardened nor habitual sinner; God knew his heart, and saw that upon timely chastisement he would repent and live. Nathan therefore, who had before communicated to him the will of God, was sent now to warn him of his guilt and danger. This he did by an ingenious parable, which induced David, out of a sudden impulse of generous indignation, in condemning an imaginary character, who had wronged his neighbour, to pronounce sentence upon himself—declaring to his astonishment when he had ceased speaking, "Thou art the man."* The conscience-stricken sovereign at once acknowledged the depth of his guiltiness, and received immediate absolution; "the Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die."† The child, however, which had been born of his guilty commerce with Bathsheba was taken from him by death, in spite of his fasting and urgent supplication; and an

* 2 Sam. xii. 7.

† Ver. 13.

assurance of further chastisement, touching him in that tender point—of the violation of the sanctities of marriage, wherein had lain his own sin, was given him by the prophet of God. So long as the child was still alive, he continued his entreaties, with every outward token of grief; but when it died, he rose from the earth, and changed his apparel, and resumed the habits of ordinary life; he knew that he had been punished far less than he deserved, and, however grateful he might have been, had he obtained his petition, he was not the less resigned to suffer its rejection. Let us imitate his earnestness in prayer, and his patience under bereavement of things dear to us, while we avoid his sin: and that we may avoid it, let us beseech God that Christ, the pattern of all purity, may dwell in our hearts by faith,* filling our minds with good desires and thoughts of power to oppose the temptations of the evil one; allowing Satan, so far as we may, no hold at all upon us; endeavouring to give way to no offence, but to be found through grace blameless and harmless, and without rebuke, as sons of God.†



CHAP. XXV.

THE REIGN OF DAVID.—PART II.

IN consideration of the sincere repentance of David, God, as we have already seen, was mercifully pleased to spare his life, which he had justly forfeited for his great transgression: nor did he limit himself

* Eph. iii. 17.

† Phil. ii. 15.

to this only, but went on to show him a further token of his abundant kindness, in allowing another son to be born to him of Bathsheba, in place of that which had been taken away by death, and marking him out by the name of Jedidiah, or the Lord's beloved, in addition to that of Solomon, as the promised inheritor of God's favour, and of his father's kingdom. Still, however, the word of threatening pronounced by Nathan was to be made good, as well as the word of promise: evil, it had been said, should be raised up against David, out of his own house; * nor was it long before the prophetic sentence received a full and terrible completion. As the crime of the king had first arisen out of too great indulgence in the sinful lusts of the flesh, so likewise did those which were destined to be its punishment: Amnon, his eldest son, gave way to a guilty passion for his half sister Tamar; and having, by the joint use of fraud and violence, accomplished his base intent, he sent her forth from his presence dishonoured and insulted. Absalom, her own brother, dissembled his anger for a time, till having found a fitting opportunity, he gave a fatal loose to it by murdering Amnon at a feast, to which he had himself invited him. Thus, in a short space of time, was David's daughter shamefully disgraced; and of his sons, one was slaughtered, and another forced to conceal himself from the justice of the laws. Absalom, however, being a favourite son of David, prevailed, after a time, upon his too indulgent father to permit, first his presence at Jerusalem, and afterwards his appearance in the royal palace, as before his crime; a weakness which soon produced the not unusual consequence of ingratitude on the part of the pardoned offender, and a persuasion that he might

* 2 Sam. xii. 11.

commit with impunity whatever lawless actions he thought fit. Now Absalom, it appears, besides being of a fierce and revengeful temper, was an ambitious man : he was determined to possess himself of power, no matter at what price : his aim was no less than to dethrone his unsuspecting father, and to seize his kingdom. He must have been irreligious too ; for if he had had any reverence for God, he must of necessity have submitted himself to the divine disposition already made to David of the kingdom for his lifetime, and, after his death, to Solomon, his son. Being, however, as he was, a child of this world, he proved himself, as they often do, wise in his generation :* he began by frequently showing himself to the people, complaining of defects in the administration of justice, and assuring them, that if he were only put in authority, they should see a far better state of public affairs : this, with much flattery and familiar conversation, addressed to all classes of the king's subjects, by degrees won their hearts from him, and led them to look with favour upon Absalom, who, when he judged the time ripe for action, proclaimed openly his traitorous purpose, and putting himself at the head of a strong body of followers, marched against Jerusalem, from which David was compelled to fly. Designing men like him there will always be in every age and country, who make it their business to fill the ears of the people with complaints of all public institutions, and with assurances how readily all defects will be remedied, if they only are entrusted with power to carry out the requisite reforms ; men who wish to make it appear that their sole object is the good of the people, while in reality they have no other end in view than the furtherance of their own private interests ; who make a profit out of the sim-

* Luke xvi. 8.

plicity of those, whose hearts, like Absalom they have stolen.* With such men all those who fear God and the king should cautiously abstain from meddling:† if imperfections exist, let them be temperately pointed out, and judiciously corrected, by those who are competent to the task, and are duly authorized so to do: but let us remember always, that it is much easier to pull down than to build up again, and that a man may be well enough qualified for the one, who will lack altogether ability for the other. Absalom did not show himself so wise in managing his usurped authority as he had in obtaining it; he took, indeed, the counsel of the celebrated sage Achitophel to do a deed of open wickedness upon the person of his father's wives, whom he had left behind him in Jerusalem; but when urged by the same sagacious adviser to pursue at once after David, and finish the struggle by one decisive blow, he adopted rather the temporizing counsel of Hushai, the Archite, who came purposely to deceive him, and suffered the king to gain time, and finally to place himself in comparative security beyond the Jordan; a piece of folly which convinced Achitophel that his ruin was certain, and prompted that wicked man, in a fit of gloomy despondency on finding his deep-laid schemes completely baffled, to put an end to his own life, reaping thus the due reward of his ingratitude and treachery. Sad and sorrowful in the mean time had been the flight of David, when, driven out by his own son, betrayed, as he fancied, by Mephibosheth, whom he had fed at his table, cursed and insulted by Shimei, he bent his way to Mahanaim, where Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, had formerly held his court: and yet, in the psalm which he composed upon this mournful occasion, we find indeed expressions of complaint,

* 2 Sam. xv. 6.

† Prov. xxiv. 21.

but we find also evident tokens of unabated confidence and faith in God. "I laid me down," he says, "and slept. I awaked, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid for ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; thy blessing is upon thy people."* Happy may we esteem ourselves, if, in the trying times of our own calamity, we can find the same comfort in thinking upon God as David did in his; if we have learnt to look upon him as our protector, as our sure friend, who will never fail us nor forsake us, so long as we put our trust in him.

A battle shortly ensued between the soldiers of David, commanded by his faithful servant Joab, and the rebels under Absalom: the latter were defeated, and Absalom, being entangled by his long and beautiful hair in an oak, was slain by Joab, in despite of a command given by David to the contrary; for Joab well knew that if the young man was once suffered to come into the presence of his father, he would be again forgiven, and probably let loose upon the world to devise and execute fresh schemes of mischief. That Joab had not miscalculated the tenderness of David towards his rebellious son was plain, from the excessive grief which he showed when he heard of his death, insomuch that the plain-spoken soldier seems to have been justified when he said to the king, "This day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well."† May we attend always to the advice of Christ's apostle, and, where many have an equal claim to share in our good will, be careful not to prefer one before another, to do nothing by partiality,‡ being well assured that

* Psalm iii. 5, 6, 8. † 2 Sam. xix. 6. ‡ 1 Tim. v. 21.

an opposite line of conduct, especially towards those of our own family, can lead to nothing but heart-burnings and strife amongst them, and deep vexation to ourselves. The king appeared to take his honest servant's admonition in good part, mixed again with his people, and soon excited in them a general determination to bring him back to Jerusalem. In returning, he showed his gratitude to Barzillai, the Gileadite, who had assisted him in the time of his distress, and his clemency towards Mephibosheth, whose excuses he accepted, and Shimei, to whom, upon confession of his fault, he granted a pardon. To Amasa, who had been the leader of Absalom's army, he did even more than this, taking him into his favour, and confiding his own troops to his command, in an expedition against the men of Israel, who, having taken offence at his too marked preference shown to his own tribe of Judah, had revolted from him, under the guidance of Sheba, a Benjamite. Joab's proud spirit could not brook this affront; and, joining the army, he slew Amasa with his own hand, and took the command of it himself, redeeming perhaps his fault in the eyes of David by the activity and perseverance with which he brought the war to a successful issue, and returned, with the head of Sheba the rebel, to Jerusalem. A famine, after this, afflicted the land for three years; and David, having consulted God as to the cause, was told that it was an offence which Saul had formerly committed, in putting to death, out of mistaken zeal, a portion of those Gibeonites, who, having been enslaved by Joshua, were kept for the menial offices of the house of God. The manner of expiating this crime was to be the surrender of some of the surviving branches of Saul's family to the Gibeonites, to be put to death; which act of solemn retribution having taken place, God was entreated

for the land. But its calamities were not yet entirely over: David himself committed a new offence, in numbering the people; thereby making flesh his arm,* and trusting not so much in the promised and long-tried protection of Israel's God, as in that by which he had himself declared no king could be preserved, "the multitude of a host."† Therefore, when the numbering, which Joab had wisely opposed as much as possible, was at last completed, we are told that "David's heart smote him,"‡ for what he had done. Nor was he left long to the terrors of conscience only: the prophet Gad was sent unto him, to offer him three things; either a renewal, for three years, of the famine which had already vexed his kingdom, or a flight of three months before his victorious enemies, or three days' pestilence in the land. Being in this great strait, he chose rather to lie under the immediate hand of God, whose mercies he knew were great, than to receive his chastisement from human enemies, of whose implacable and pitiless character he had had a long and bitter experience. Accordingly, the land of Israel was subjected to a visitation of pestilence; and, as if to show him how rapidly those multitudes in whom he had placed his ill-grounded confidence, could melt away, seventy thousand of them died on the first day of the plague. Then David experienced the advantage of his choice, in placing himself in the hands of God: the Lord repented him of the evil, and said unto the destroying angel, "It is enough; stay now thine hand."§ His anxious prayers, united with those of his suffering people, who doubtless saw in this infliction their own just punishment for their frequent rebellions and many sins, were heard and


* Jerem. xvii. 5.

† 2 Sam. xxiv. 10.

† Psalm xxxiii. 16.

§ Ver. 16.

accepted: and, as a pledge of their acceptance, he was commanded to go up to the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, an inhabitant of Jerusalem, and there to offer a sacrifice of burnt-offerings and peace offerings to the Lord, who answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar. The place being thus consecrated, as it were, by God's approval, was fixed upon by the grateful king, as the site of the future temple, for which he continued to make large preparations until the end of his reign,—an event which was now rapidly approaching. He became old, and full of days; and having publicly declared to the people his intention to leave the kingdom to his son Solomon, he devoted his remaining energies to secure for him the desired succession; for the right of Solomon to succeed his father was not universally admitted. Adonijah, another of David's sons, laid claim to the kingdom also; and being supported by Joab, and Abiathar the priest, proceeded to hold a festival, at which he called none but his own friends together, with the intention of proclaiming himself heir to the throne. David, however, being informed in time by his wife Bathsheba, and the prophet Nathan, of this undutiful attempt, took an immediate and decisive step to baffle it: he sent Nathan, with Zadok the priest, and Benaiah, one of his mighty men, to lead out Solomon to a public place, where Zadok, with all due ceremony, anointed him as king; which tidings when Adonijah heard, he fled, being deserted by his friends, and sought refuge at the altar of God; from which he did not depart, till he had received a promise from Solomon that his life should be spared, upon condition that he conducted himself humbly and obediently for the future. David, having thus secured the succession to Solomon, and having given him some advice as to his behaviour to Joab and Shimei, both of whom he foresaw that it might be necessary for



him to treat with rigour, sank at last under the increasing infirmities of age, and died in that stronghold of Zion, which he had won from the heathen : a man who, whether as a successful champion, a powerful king, or a composer of those holy and prophetic Psalms which God's own Spirit taught him, ranks certainly among the most memorable individuals who ever lived, and fully deserves the reverence and affection with which he has been to this day regarded by his countrymen. To Christians he is recommended by an additional view which they may take of him, as an ancestor, a prophet, and a type of Christ ; they may remember that Jesus their Lord "was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh ;"* they may reflect that in the Psalms composed by him, the sufferings, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension of the Saviour are all distinctly noticed ; that finally, the Messiah himself has not disdained to be called by the name of his earthly ancestor ; that "the sure mercies of David"† are the sure mercies of Christ ; and when they have read the history of the son of Jesse, may rise convinced by the perusal, that the best and most favoured of God's merely human servants show always a large proportion of frailty and offence ; and that for perfection we must look alone to Him of whom David, in his best estate, was but a feeble image, the true defender and ruler of his people, the King of kings,‡ who was not the son of David only, but his immortal Lord—the Son of God, who liveth and abideth for ever.§

* Rom. i. 3.

† Isaiah. lv. 3. Acts xiii. 34.

‡ Rev. xix. 16.

§ Mark xii. 35—37. Psalm cx. 1.



CHAP. XXVI.

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON.

THE constant success which had attended David in his numerous wars against the enemies of his country, and the energy with which, in the last moments of his life, he had suppressed the faction of Adonijah, concurred in affording to his son Solomon the expectation of a peaceful reign, undisturbed by hostile attempts, whether foreign or domestic. Solomon, however, ascended his father's throne with a stronger assurance of its tranquil possession than the mere actual state of things was able to confer: he knew that the word of the Lord had come to David, saying, "Behold a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days."* This declaration led him to look to the true quarter from which all security, whether political or personal, derives its origin,—the favour of his God; and therefore, having sought that favour according to the religious institutions of his country, by offering up a solemn sacrifice to him at Gibeon, where the tabernacle still was, though the ark had been removed to Jerusalem, when God appeared to him in a dream, by night, and said, "Ask what I shall give thee,"† the young king remembered his father's prayer concerning him,—“the Lord give thee wisdom and understanding;”‡ and for these blessings he humbly asked. “Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”§ God was graciously pleased to approve

* 1 Chron. xxii. 9.

† 1 Kings iii. 5.

‡ 1 Chron. xxii. 12.

§ 1 Kings iii. 9.

of this request, not only for what he had, but for what he had *not* demanded; it showed that he was free from selfishness, inasmuch as he had not asked for himself long life, to enjoy the advantages of his royal station; free from covetousness, inasmuch as he had not asked for riches or honour; and free from malice, inasmuch as he had not asked the life of his enemies, but had craved only that talent which ought to be possessed by every ruler who would do justice to his people; and therefore not only was it granted him in abundance, but also those other gifts of wealth and honour, which are the disgrace and ruin of the foolish, but become, under the guidance of wisdom, desirable instruments of manifold advantage to mankind. No sooner had he obtained this precious gift, than he was called upon to exercise it on a remarkable occasion: a woman came before him, complaining of her fellow-lodger, who, like herself, had lately become a mother, that, in the night, her own child having died through her negligence, she had taken away her while she slept, and substituted the dead infant in its room. This being denied by the accused person, as strongly as it was asserted by the other, the king, according to the sagacity divinely given him, perceived at once a method of deciding the matter: "he said, bring a sword, and divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other."* She whose own the child was not, and who took no real interest in it for its own sake, agreed to this apparently inhuman and absurd proposal: while all the true feelings of a mother being excited by it in the bosom of the other, she at once preferred even giving up her claim to it, to suffering it to die: "O, my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. Then the king said, give *her* the living child, and

in no wise slay it : she is the mother thereof.”* If any of us lack wisdom, let us ask it, like Solomon, of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;† let us use with thankfulness and with diligence the understanding which he thus bestows upon us, till we come, by reason of use, to have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil,‡ and to form a right judgment in all things, as to which our decision is required. The king of Israel was called upon, soon after this, to discharge a more painful duty ;—Adonijah, supported by Joab, and Abiathar the priest, renewed his pretensions to the kingdom, by asking to contract a marriage with Abishag, the companion of his father’s age ; this, according to the manners of the east, was considered as an act of insubordination and rebellion, and as such was punished by Solomon, who caused both him and Joab to be put to death, and Abiathar to be deprived of the priesthood, and banished from Jerusalem. Having performed this act of indispensable severity, he addressed himself to the great object of his peaceable possession of the throne, the building with all due magnificence the temple of God ; availing himself of all the treasures which David during his lifetime had laid up for that purpose, of all the resources of his own country, and of assistance from foreign lands, especially from the famous city of Tyre, whose king supplied him with timber in exchange for corn, and oil, and wine, and sent him also an experienced artist to superintend the work. This celebrated building, composed of materials of the most costly description, and employing the labour of a vast multitude of people, was raised in the course of seven years, from the fourth to the eleventh of Solomon’s reign : it stood upon the Mount Moriah, where David had erected an altar during the plague,

* 1 Kings iii. 27.

† James i. 5.

‡ Heb. v. 14.

in the threshing-floor of Ornan, or Araunah, the Jebusite: it was formed with a holy and a most holy place, after the manner of the former tabernacle; and when the ark of the covenant was placed within it, and all Israel assembled together to its solemn dedication, God showed his acceptance of the work and of the prayer then offered up by Solomon in behalf of his people, by consuming with fire from heaven the sacrifices on the altar, and filling the house with his cloud of glory. We know assuredly that God is everywhere; that "in him," whatever may be our local position upon earth, "we live, and move, and have our being;"* that we have no right to presume, unless upon his especial warrant, that he will dwell in temples made with hands, or esteem any earthly habitation his place of rest;† but we know also, that in condescension to our present capacities, and with the gracious view of assisting our devotions, he has vouchsafed to nominate and point out certain particular places in which it was his pleasure to be more peculiarly present among us. Such were, in the times of which I have been speaking, first, the tabernacle, and afterwards the temple; and such are our churches now: they bear above others the venerable and endearing title of the houses of God; they are the appointed places for our gathering together as Christian worshippers, in full reliance upon the promise of the incarnate God, that where two or three are so met together in his name, there he will be in the midst of them.‡ May we all so seek the church, and so conduct ourselves while in it, as to show that we are fully impressed with this important truth: and may we obtain from the means of grace which we enjoy in this his material temple, an earnest of his dwelling in that temple, to us of still nearer concernment,

* Acts xvii. 28 † Acts vii. 48, 49. ‡ Matt. xviii. 20.

the temple of our hearts: "as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* The visible appearance of the divine glory within the newly dedicated building, while it tended to stablish and encourage both Solomon and the Israelites in a firm belief of the protection of God, might have a tendency to lead them into the supposition that for its own sake he would abide in it for ever, without respect to the conduct of his worshippers. A vision of the night was therefore granted to Solomon, warning him that this would not be so; but that if the people of Israel forsook him, he also would forsake them, and cast out of his sight the stately house which he had sanctified for his name. In like manner "after we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin;"† and unless through the renewal of that grace "we rise again and amend our lives," we shall be cast out of the sight of that glorious Being, who is too just and pure to dwell within a wilfully corrupted and rebellious soul.

Solomon, having thus discharged the main duty of a religious prince, in providing for the public worship of God, had leisure to attend to concerns of a more private nature; he contracted a marriage with the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and having built a palace for her reception, he brought her home to it with all due solemnity: an event which probably forms the literal subject of the forty-fifth Psalm, where the queen is represented as being brought in to the king in raiment of needlework, an Egyptian fabric; as also of the Canticles or Song of Solomon: both which, however, contain also a spiritual meaning, and speak in figurative language concerning Christ and his church,‡ the mystical union between whom

* 2 Cor. vi. 16.

† Article xvi.

‡ Eph. v. 32.

is frequently represented in Holy Scriptures in the light of a marriage. Nor, while intent upon securing to himself the blessings of domestic happiness, did this wise king neglect his country's welfare ; but strengthened and increased it by the building of many new cities, the splendid ruins existing on the site of one of which, called by him Tadmor in the wilderness, but now Palmyra, remain unto this day ; and laboured also successfully for its improvement, by encouraging in its inhabitants a spirit of commercial enterprise, sending out his fleets on distant expeditions, which returned to him laden with the produce of foreign lands. And here let us note, with the approbation which it deserves, the noble mind of Hiram, king of Tyre, who, far from entertaining that mean spirit of jealousy towards an aspiring rival, which but too many would have felt in similar circumstances, actually gave him all the assistance in his power, allowing his own skilful seamen to sail in the ships of Solomon. It were much to be wished that professed Christians were always to be found acting as generously as this heathen king: helping those engaged in the same pursuit as themselves—or at the very least, throwing no obstacles in their way, and showing no mortification at their success. Besides the success of his trading speculations, another effect followed these well-considered measures of Solomon : the knowledge of his actions, and the fame of his wisdom were widely spread abroad ; insomuch that the queen of Sheba, determining to make proof of it by actual observation and inquiry on the spot, came from a great distance to visit him, and finding every thing to surpass her utmost expectation, expressed her satisfaction, not only in words, but by presenting him with the most costly gifts. Of this queen our Lord has said, that she should rise up in the judgment with the men of his generation, and should

condemn them.* Her conduct in coming from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon would put them to shame, who, when a greater in every respect than Solomon, even their own Messiah, was among them, remained neglectful of his teaching, and as it were unconscious of so great a blessing. Let us diligently follow her example, and seek for wisdom, as men seek for silver, and search for it as for hid treasures:† let us remember always that “happy is the man who findeth wisdom, and the man who getteth understanding;” that “all the things we can desire are not to be compared unto it;” and that when we have once found this pearl of great price, we should sell whatever else we have, and buy it‡—buy it of him who counselleth us to do so, that we may see those treasures of knowledge and happiness which are hid in him§—of that greater and more gracious than Solomon, who hath said, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.”|| We have hitherto regarded this wise king of Israel as an object of admiration, and an example to be followed: it remains that he afford us one lesson more, and that in his person we should receive an impressive warning, how liable the most guarded are to give way to temptation; and when we think we are standing most securely, take heed lest we fall.¶ This man, so eminent for the highest endowments of intellect, and the most extensive range of learning; this man, by whose lips God had so often spoken, who had laid down the most instructive rules of conduct, and was the admired author of three thousand proverbs, and of a thousand songs; to whom the various productions of nature were familiar, and who exceeded the venerable sages of old time in fame of

* Matt. xii. 42. † Prov. ii. 4; iii. 13, 15. ‡ Matt. xiii. 46.
§ Rev. iii. 18. || John vi. 37. ¶ 1 Cor. x. 12.

moral wisdom,—this man was enticed by sinners,* and consented unto them; he loved strange women in his old age,† and his wives beguiled his heart; he built for them high places, and idolatrous altars, and burned incense unto their gods. The promise made by the true God to David preserved him from being cast off as he deserved; but it brought upon him a heavy doom, even the rending away of the kingdom from his posterity, and the bestowal of it upon his servant. That this declaration awakened Solomon from his delusive dream, and roused him to a proper sense of his own wickedness, and of God's mercy towards him, is rendered highly probable by the sentiments which we find in the book of Ecclesiastes, which bears internal evidence of having been composed at this late period of his life; when, having made trial of all the substitutes for holiness which the world had to offer, he had found the absolute vanity of all, and came at last to this, as the conclusion of the whole matter; “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.”‡



CHAP. XXVII.

THE SEPARATION OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL.

WHEN our Lord Jesus Christ was desirous of exciting in the minds of his disciples a spirit of trusting confidence in the providential care of their Father in heaven, he invited them to the contem-

* Prov. i. 10. † 1 Kings xi. 1, 8. ‡ Eccles. xii. 13.

plation of the lilies of the field, which he described as more beautifully arrayed than even Solomon in all his glory.* How great was the magnificence and splendour of that illustrious king, it was my object to declare in the foregoing chapter; and I would now, in continuation, request you to observe, that the resemblance between his glory and that of the lilies of the field, consisted as well in its perishableness as in its beauty—that as the grass which withereth, as the flower which fadeth, so was all the goodness thereof;† that like other rich and wise men, he also went hence and left his riches to another.‡ Those he might and did leave to his successor, but he was unable to leave his wisdom: “Who knoweth,” he said himself, “whether the man that shall be after me shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun.”§ Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, soon showed himself remarkably wanting in that judgment and discretion, essential to the ruling of such a kingdom as that of Israel: a spirit of dissatisfaction existed in it, which could only be calmed by lenity and moderation, produced by the great strictness of his father’s yoke: and when requested by the people to lighten their burthens, he unhappily took advice, not of the aged and experienced men who had been the counsellors of Solomon, but of his own young and rash companions; assuring the petitioners, that it was his purpose to rule them with increased severity, so that, as he expressed it, his little finger should be thicker than his father’s loins.|| The people of Israel, indignant at this rough and threatening answer, and finding a ready leader in Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, a man who had been already pointed out by the prophet

* Matt. vi. 28, 29. † Isa. xl. 6, 7. ‡ Ps. xlix. 10.

§ Eccles. ii. 18, 19. || 1 Kings xii. 10.

Ahijah as their future governor, and had therefore been an object of suspicion to Solomon, broke out into open rebellion against the king, compelling him to take refuge in Jerusalem, and killing the officer whom he had sent to gather tribute among them. Ten tribes went over in this manner to Jeroboam; the other two, Judah and Benjamin, remaining faithful to the family of David, as had before been intimated by the prophet, when having torn the garment of Jeroboam into twelve pieces, he had given him ten. Rehoboam, however, unmindful of this, was purposed to make use of those who still acknowledged his authority, to re-establish it over the rest; he collected an army of an hundred and eighty thousand men, and was preparing to make war upon Israel, when Shemaiah the prophet was dispatched to prevent it, with the decisive message from God, "Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me."* Rehoboam, however wanting in understanding his foregoing conduct had showed him to be, was not guilty of the still greater folly of fighting against God; he returned quietly home with his army, and betook himself, with some temporary exercise at least of a sound policy, to the strengthening of his kingdom. May we all in our several conditions submit ourselves under the mighty hand of God, when he tries us with worldly losses and tribulations, feeling sure that his chastisements are for our spiritual good, and that, if he sees it fitting again to exalt us, he will do so in due time. Worldly prosperity, let us remember, is no undoubted testimonial of the favour of God: Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, enjoyed much prosperity in this world, and as an instrument to work out his purposes, was raised by him to be king

* 1 Kings xii. 24.

over ten tribes of his countrymen; but he was still left to the dominion of a carnal mind, and his name descended to posterity, as of one whose crimes formed a standard by which the iniquities of his successors were to be measured, as of the man who caused Israel to sin. The manner in which he wrought this great evil now claims our attention: he felt, it appears, insecure in his newly acquired authority, so long as his subjects considered themselves under the religious obligation of going up, at the times commanded in the law of Moses, to worship at Jerusalem, the capital city of his rival. In order to escape from this disadvantage, he planned and executed the daring project of setting up for them objects of worship at home: he caused two calves to be made of gold, and placing one at Bethel in the south, and the other at Dan, the northern extremity of his land, he proclaimed to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."* In thus acting, Jeroboam became guilty himself, and caused his people to become guilty, of the two grievous sins of schism and of idolatry: of schism, by a causeless separation from the assembly of the Jewish Church, and of idolatry, by renewing the worship of the golden calf, in the very words of its first institution at Horeb,† with a strange forgetfulness of all the circumstances attending that transaction, which showed how deeply it had offended God. And this he did, not from any conscientious though mistaken preference for that form of worship more than any other, but from motives of mere worldly policy; because he feared the reaction which might take place upon men's minds, if they were suffered to go up to Jerusalem, and be exposed to the arguments and solicitations of Rehoboam and

• 1 Kings xii. 28.

† Exod. xxxii. 8.

his friends. Let us pray God that the Church of Christ may be protected from those who stir up strifes, and cause divisions within it, from motives no purer than these—whose practices are irregular, and whose aims selfish, and who make their gain of the deluded people whom they lead into sin.

Jeroboam, not contented with thus changing the object and the place of his country's worship, went on to introduce alterations also in its times, and the ministers who conducted it—establishing a solemn feast in the eighth month by his own authority, consecrating any one of the very lowest of the people to be priests, and himself exercising that office, by offering incense upon the altar at Bethel which he had made. It was while he was thus engaged, that a man of God from Judah pronounced in his presence the remarkable prophecy, which foretold that a king should hereafter arise out of the house of David, Josiah by name, who should slay the priests of these idolatrous high places, and defile the altar itself, by burning men's bones upon it. His authority to foretell these things was attested by the immediate performance of two miracles; the king's hand, which had been stretched forth to seize him, was suddenly dried up, and the altar was rent asunder, and the ashes upon it poured forth. Jeroboam, astonished and alarmed at these strange occurrences, besought and obtained of the prophet the restoration of his hand; but was unsuccessful in an attempt to retain him to take refreshment in his palace, the commission of the man of God having been, to eat no bread nor drink water in Bethel, and to return to his own country by a different road. Yet, although this prophet of the Most High had resisted firmly both the anger and the favour of Jeroboam, he suffered himself to be beguiled from the steadfastness of his obedience, by the falsehood of a brother. An old prophet, dwelling in Bethel, per-

sued him that he had been authorized to bring him back to his house, and to give him that repast which the Lord had forbidden : an instance of culpable weakness which was speedily visited by a heavy punishment, denounced against him by his crafty entertainer, compelled to speak by the spirit of prophecy, and executed by a lion which met him on his homeward way and slew him. The old prophet, who could not but have been struck forcibly, and, we may humbly hope, beneficially to himself, by this manifest proof of the severity of God towards those who disregard his plain commandments, committed his body to his own grave, and enjoined his sons, that, when he died, they should lay his bones beside it, in confidence that the word which he had spoken against the altar in Bethel, and against all the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, would surely come to pass. From this history we may learn the danger of neglecting that which we know to be our duty, and of suffering any assertions or advice of man to weigh against the direct injunctions of our heavenly Lord. There are many self-appointed and ignorant men to be found, always ready to act as the guides of others ; there are many of a worse description, who designedly lie in wait to deceive the unwary, who like the old prophet of Bethel, if it suits their purpose, will not scruple to lie unto us. If any such parties counsel things which are inconsistent with the doctrines of Scripture, as interpreted by the consent of Christ's universal Church, we are bound to reject them, and to pray for grace and light to maintain with understanding the purity of our faith, and the integrity of our practice. " Believe not every spirit," says St. John ; " but try the spirits, whether they are of God."*

The course of the history now leads us back to the

* 1 John iv. 1.

kingdom of Judah, and Rehoboam its king, who, having for a while walked in the ways of his fathers David and Solomon, began at last to depart from them, and to forsake the law of the Lord; a defection which was soon punished by the invasion of Shishak the Egyptian, with a great army, who plundered the treasury of the temple, and of the royal palace; God, upon the repentance and humiliation of his people, limiting their chastisement to this disgrace and loss. Rehoboam, thus strikingly admonished, continued in a better frame of mind during the remainder of his reign, which lasted seventeen years, and was succeeded by that of his son Abijah, memorable only for a victory, granted him for his unhesitating trust in God, over Jeroboam and the men of Israel, although the multitude of the army of his opponents doubled his own. The war in which this victory took place was carried on between Judah and Israel as two independent kingdoms, and therefore was not contrary to the command of God, which merely forbade Judah from attempting to reunite Israel with itself, as a revolted province, by force of arms. For we can never expect those undertakings to prosper, be they what they may, which are carried on against the declared will of God: to such he has promised no blessing, however eager and diligent we may be in their execution, but has assured us that we shall meet in the end with nothing but discomfiture and disappointment. Abijah, however, though in this instance he stood up manfully for God, was by no means his consistent follower in all things: his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God,* and the example of his unstable father Rehoboam was but too often the object of his imitation. His reign was short, and disturbed by war: he left, however, his

* 1 Kings xv. 3.

kingdom in a strong and flourishing condition to his son Asa, who governed it prosperously for forty-one years, showing himself zealous as well for the religious improvement, as for the civil aggrandizement of his people. The latter of these he consulted, by carrying on with success two wars, one against Ethiopia, the other against Israel, and by employing the interval of peace in increasing his military force, and strengthening the cities of Judah. With respect to the former, he became an active reformer of those idolatrous abuses which had been introduced or encouraged during the reigns of Rehoboam and Abijah, deposing even his own mother from her royal dignity, because she had made an idol in a grove; and carrying on the work of amendment, which he thus began in his own house, in every portion of his dominions. Encouraged by the exhortations of the prophet Azariah, he gathered together his subjects, as well as those of Israel who would join him, from all quarters to Jerusalem, and caused them to enter into a covenant, to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul. These were good and pious acts, but truth obliges us impartially to record also the failings of his conduct: in his war with Israel, instead of relying exclusively on God, he bought the assistance of Benhadad, king of Syria; and when reprov'd for this want of faith he the prophet Hanani, instead of humbling himself, by was wroth with the seer, and shut him up in prison. Also in his last disease, which ended fatally after two years of suffering, "he sought not unto the Lord, but unto the physicians."* Human means are not to be rashly neglected, but they are always to be resorted to in subordination to reliance upon God, and to

* 2 Chron. xvi. 12.

prayer for his mercy: "commit thy works unto the Lord," saith the wise man's proverb, "and thy thoughts shall be established."*

CHAP. XXVIII.

HISTORY OF ELIJAH—AHAB—JEHOSHAPHAT.

HAVING brought down the history of the kingdom of Judah to the death of Asa, its third king, I now propose, before giving you any account of Jehoshaphat, his son and successor, to recall your attention for a few moments to the events which had taken place in the mean time within the kingdom of Israel. These, as we might be led to expect from the godless policy of its founder Jeroboam, were of a turbulent and disastrous character: the choice of the men of Israel of sovereigns of their own, without regard to God's promises to the family of David, seemed destined to be punished by an uninterrupted succession of bad and cruel kings. God, in giving them their desires, sent misery withal into their souls; and the eldest son of Jeroboam, a promising young prince, was taken away by an early, though not a violent death, and alone of all his brethren was allowed the decent rites of burial, "because in him there was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel."† After the death of this young prince, his brother Nadab, a wicked man, became heir of the kingdom, but enjoyed it only two years, being assassinated by Baasha, while laying siege to Gibbethon, a city of the Philistines.

* Prov. xvi. 3; comp. Eccus. xxxviii. 9—14.

† 1 Kings xiv. 13.

The cruelty of Baasha fulfilled to the utmost the threatenings of God against the family of Jeroboam; he left not any that breathed: but, although exalted out of the dust, and made by the Divine power the prince of Israel, he walked obstinately in the ways of that wicked king, whose house he had destroyed; and therefore deserved, and at last received, a like punishment himself, in the destruction of his own race, including Elah his son, who succeeded him on the throne, by Zimri, the captain of his chariots, who murdered the dissolute and helpless prince while he was drinking himself drunk in the house of his steward at Tirzah, and reigned in his stead. Seven days employed by him in the slaughter of Baasha's descendants, was the whole of Zimri's reign: Omri, at the head of the army, rebelled against him; and when he found the rebels too strong for him, he went into the royal palace, and burnt it over him with fire, and died. Omri, though victorious, did not at first obtain peaceable possession of the kingdom: for six years, his rival Tibni was followed by half of the people, till slain in battle, when Omri became king over Israel, and transferred the royal residence from Tirzah to the more celebrated city of Samaria. He was as wicked as the rest, but his son Ahab was worse than all: "it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him: and he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove: and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all that were before him."*

I have dwelt longer perhaps than may be pleasing

* 1 Kings xvi. 31.

upon this sad catalogue of bloodsheddings and crimes: but not, I trust, longer than may be profitable, if you are brought to look upon it as the natural consequence to any people of casting off their God; if you read in it the lesson of everlasting concernment to all the world, that sin evermore carries with it its own increasing punishment, waxing worse and worse, rendering its victims more hateful and abominable, more disposed to hate, to injure, and to devour one another. It was not, however, the purpose of a merciful God to allow the ten tribes of Israel, rebellious though they were, to sink altogether into the abyss of ruin so rapidly as the crimes of their kings had a tendency to hurry them; he interposed a strong check to the growing degeneracy of the nation, by raising up an individual among them, most eminent among the prophets for the austerity of his life, the greatness of his miracles, and the boldness of his character: "Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, as the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."* We learn from the assurance of an apostle of Christ, that this word, in the mouth of Elijah, was a word of prayer: "he was a man," says St. James, "subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."† St. James brings forward this instance as a proof that "the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,"‡ and as an inducement to Christians to pray for each other, that they might be healed both of their bodily and spiritual diseases. And may you,

* 1 Kings xvii. 1.

† James v. 17, 18.

‡ Ver. 16.

who read of these things, feeling your need of a like assistance from above, employ like means of obtaining it: let your prayers be fervent and earnest, and “ask in faith, nothing wavering:”* and so avail yourselves of the grace already granted you, that they may be the prayers of righteous upright men, who sincerely and in truth desire what they ask; who wish to be wholly freed from the bondage of sin, and to become servants unto righteousness.

Elijah, during the long drought which his prayers had brought as a punishment upon the nation, was miraculously supported, first, in a retired situation near the brook Cherith, where the ravens had their natural instinct so divinely changed, as to bring him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and afterwards, when the brook dried up, in the village of Sarepta, which belonged to Zidon, where a poor widow woman was appointed to sustain him. This history our Lord applied to his countrymen in Nazareth, saying, “No prophet is accepted in his own country: but I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years, but unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow:”† showing them that no one, because of any fancied privileges of his outward condition, hath a claim upon God’s favour; that oftentimes, resisting the proud, he giveth it unto the humble,‡ and that those who enjoy apparently the most easy access to the means of grace, are not always the most ready, or the most willing to use them. The poor widow, whom Elijah was commanded to look to for support, was herself in danger of undergoing the extremity of famine: when he came to her, she had nothing left but “an

* James i. 6. † Luke iv. 24—26. ‡ James iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5.

handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse."* Yet these, being so requested, she shared cheerfully and in a meek spirit of trusting resignation with the man of God : and upon these, preserved from wasting by a constant miracle, she and her son and her guest the prophet were sustained for many days. Nor was this the only reward which she brought upon herself, by her marked exercise of faith and charity : her son was afterwards actually raised from the dead by means of the prayers of Elijah, before that prophet quitted her hospitable roof, to undertake by God's command the dangerous errand of showing himself to the angry Ahab, and denouncing him to his face as one who had "troubled Israel, in that he had forsaken the commandment of the Lord."†

The Spirit which animated Elijah in the discharge of this duty appears, like that which in after times rested on Christ's apostles, to have given him a mouth and wisdom which none were able to gainsay or resist.‡ The king, instead of punishing his boldness, consented to call together an assembly of the people, before whom the claims of Jehovah and of Baal to be accounted God should be submitted to the test of a miracle. An altar was prepared and a victim laid thereon, and whichever of the two answered the call of his servants by sending down fire from heaven, was thenceforward to be entitled to the undivided worship of the people. The priests of Baal did not dare for shame to refuse this public trial of their faith ; they cried therefore to their idol, cutting themselves after their barbarous custom with knives and lancets, but all in vain : while the solemn prayer of Elijah was immediately answered by the descent of heavenly fire, and the people fell on their faces and said, "The Lord He is the God."§ This great triumph of the true religion was followed

* 1 Kings xvii. 12.

† Luke xxi. 15.

‡ 1 Ibid. xviii. 18.

§ 1 Kings xviii. 39.

by that solemn prayer of Elijah upon Mount Carmel, which opened the heaven, and brought down an abundant rain upon the land of Israel ; and, as if to show the inconstancy of all things earthly, and which depend even in part upon the strength of man, it was followed also by the flight of that same prophet from the fury of Ahab's dangerous wife, the cruel Jezebel, who had vowed to slay him, because he had done these great things, and had destroyed the priests of Baal. The courage which had forsaken him in that trying moment was restored in the wilderness, whither he fled, by a vision of God in his holy mountain ; and he was taught by the "still small voice"* with which the Spirit speaketh comfort to his servants, that God had still more duties to impose upon him, and a man in store to succeed him, Elisha, the son of Shaphat, whom he was commanded to anoint. There likewise he received the consolatory assurance, that he was not alone, as he fancied, in Israel, a devout worshipper of the true God, but that he had still left him seven thousand there, who had never bowed the knee to the image of Baal ; "a remnant according to the election of grace,"† such as there was in the first age of the Gospel, and such as there will ever be, till the work of God shall be finally accomplished, and "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ."‡ In the mean while Ahab, though awe-struck for a time, and perhaps prevented from returning publicly to the worship of Baal, appears to have entertained no real sentiments of penitence and amendment, but to have been as much as ever under the dominion of a carnal mind. The only action which we read of him, bearing upon the face of it an appearance of kindness and mercy, namely, his sparing the king of Syria when he had

* 1 Kings xix. 12. † Rom. xi. 4, 5. ‡ Rev. xi. 15.

him in his power, was in itself an act of disobedience towards God, who had commanded that king's destruction : while the manner in which he possessed himself of the vineyard of Naboth, by suborning, or allowing Jezebel to suborn false witnesses against that innocent man, and causing him to be put to death, showed his base character in its true colours, and brought upon him the sentence of utter ruin to his whole family by the mouth of Elijah.

It is pleasing, when Holy Writ exhibits to us any one as a melancholy example of prevailing sin, to find that it exhibits him also as an instance of accepted repentance. This in some degree was the case with Ahab : overwhelmed by the terrible prospect disclosed to him by Elijah, he had recourse to such means as his awakened conscience suggested to him, of appeasing his offended God ; " he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly."* God who knew how far he did these things in sincerity, was pleased to show his approval of them, and to encourage through him all repenting sinners, by the postponement at least, though not the full remission, of the penalty which awaited him. " Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evils in his days, but in his son's days I will bring the evil upon his house : " that is, his eyes not seeing it, he being mercifully removed by the stroke of death before the vengeance should fall upon his family. For himself there was allotted a soldier's-death, in battle against the enemies of his country ; and there may be reason to suppose that his latter conduct was, outwardly at least, far altered from that of his earlier days, when we find that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah did not refuse to contract an alliance with him, and to go up in his company to his

* 1 Kings xxi. 27.

last battle against the Syrians, though in his inward mind, as we learn from the prophet Jehu, who rebuked Jehoshaphat for this very thing, there was still enmity against God. With the exception of this too easy connexion with Ahab, Jehoshaphat had shown himself a resolute follower of his father Asa, in all that king's most righteous and pious ways—removing all gross abominations out of the land, and striving, by various well considered institutions, to promote the spiritual as well as temporal welfare of his subjects. Of instruction in the law of God, and in the main duties of religion, it appears that they were singularly destitute ; and this he endeavoured to remedy, by sending out a certain number of learned men, partly princes of his court, partly priests and Levites, to go about through all the cities of Judah, carrying with them the book of the law, and out of it to teach the people. Nor was he, like the Pharisees of after times,* ready to impose burdens upon others which he himself touched not with one of his fingers, but cheerfully took his own part in the work of reformation, going out through the people from Beersheba to Mount Ephraim, and bringing them back unto the Lord God of their fathers. And when the lack of religious instruction had been thus supplied, and a spirit awakened in the people of inclination towards holy things, as well as an improved state of moral feeling, he took measures to perpetuate that which had been so well begun, by forming these able and discreet men, when they returned from their progress through the provinces, into a permanent court of civil and ecclesiastical justice, which should hold its sittings at Jerusalem.

The benefit of these institutions was soon perceptible, when, upon occasion of an invasion of the Moabites, the people, instead of despairing, or trusting

* Matt. xxiii. 4.

in their own strength, assembled themselves together to ask help of the Lord: and on this, as well as all other fitting occasions, they found their king at their head: "he stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord,"* and put up a solemn prayer to God in behalf of his people. His prayer was immediately answered by the descent of God's spirit of prophecy upon the Levite Jahaziel, who promised them that which soon afterwards came to pass, a complete victory over their enemies. These things, above the "riches and honour"† which he possessed abundantly, constitute the claim of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to the admiration and respect of those who read his history: may we find always in our earthly rulers such watchful guardians of their people as was he; and may the care which they bestow on us produce a like return on our parts, in amended morals, and sounder faith, in a more constant attendance on public worship, and a firmer reliance on our God.

CHAP. XXIX.

THE HISTORY OF ELISHA.—PART I.

AFTER the death of Ahab in battle, his son Ahaziah succeeded him upon the throne of Israel. This prince passed the short period of his reign, which did not exceed two years, in wicked and idolatrous courses. The whole bias of his mind, indeed, seems to have been so thoroughly perverted, that, when lying on his death-bed, to which an acci-

* 2 Chron. xx. 5.

† Ibid. xviii. 1.

dental fall through his palace-window had brought him, his thoughts were turned, not to the God of Israel, but to the idol of Ekron, whom the Philistines worshipped under the title of Baal-zebub; a title appropriated in the times of the gospel to the spiritual enemy of mankind, the prince of the demons who, by their possession of mortal bodies, produced in them infirmity and disease. His supposed power over these calamities may possibly have been the reason which induced Ahaziah to apply to him upon occasion of his sickness: the king's messengers, however, were not allowed to reach their destination; Elijah met them on their way, and sent them back to their master, with the stern assurance, that speedy death awaited him as the punishment of his infidelity, and of his many crimes. Certified by their description that it was indeed the ancient enemy of his house, (for the carnally-minded look upon all God's faithful servants as their enemies,) he sent successively two captains at the head of fifty men to seize him, who were both destroyed, at the call of Elijah, by fire from heaven: to the third, who came before him in a more humble and suppliant manner, the prophet willingly committed himself; and appearing before the king, repeated personally his former message, and left him to the torments of a guilty conscience, and the pangs of approaching death. Elijah was a man fitted, by the uncompromising boldness and severity of his character, for the troublesome times in which he lived: he was armed, for his own protection and for the chastisement of offenders, with miraculous powers, and he exercised them with unsparing zeal. We have, however, a warning, that in these points he is not to be considered as an object of imitation by the servants of Christ: they who, if any, would use means like these of punishing such as oppose themselves to the reception or the influence of the gospel, "know not what spirit

they are of.”* The declaration of Christ to this effect, addressed to his disciples James and John, when, being refused admittance into a village of the Samaritans, they said, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and destroy them, even as Elijah did?” was a rebuke not to them only, but to all, who, having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge,† act as if they had forgotten that his blessed Son came amongst men, “not to destroy their lives, but to save them.” Still, though the conduct of Elijah, on this or similar occasions, be no model for ours; though suffering rather than infliction of evil be the badge of our profession; we must not, indeed we cannot reasonably suppose that in so doing he acted without the sanction of God, who sent down the fire from heaven at his request. This, his last great act of authority in the exercise of his office, was speedily followed by his bodily removal from the scene of his earthly labours with glory into heaven: his re-appearance before the coming of the day of the Lord was foretold by the prophet Malachi, ‡ and was verified, as far as relates to the first coming of Christ, by the preaching of John the Baptist, in his “spirit and power;” § and he it was who, in conjunction with Moses, was seen in attendance upon the blessed Jesus at his transfiguration on the Mount, and admitted to converse with him upon the great mystery of “his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”||

Looking, then, upon Elijah, for all these reasons, as a man especially favoured and dignified by God, let us consider a little more in detail the circumstances of his removal from the earth, which took place as follows:—Being made acquainted with the

* Luke ix. 55, 56. † Rom. x. 2. ‡ Mal. iv. 5.

§ Luke i. 17.

|| Luke ix. 30, 31.

purpose of God concerning him, he took his way, accompanied by his faithful minister and friend Elisha, whom he vainly requested to remain behind, from Gilgal, first to Bethel, and from thence, by Jericho, to the banks of Jordan; the prophets of both which places, as it appears, had been similarly informed of that which was about to happen, though probably the exact manner of it was not revealed to them.* Arrived at Jordan, he performed a great miracle in their sight, by striking the waters with his mantle, and dividing them so as to admit of his passage, and that of Elisha, who alone was permitted to attend him. Then it was that the master, being now on the point of being separated from his disciple and faithful servant, and willing to give him a last proof of affection, said to him, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken from thee. And Elisha said, Let, I pray thee, a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."† The prophet plainly supposed, that

* These schools of the prophets appear to have been originally instituted in the days of Samuel, perhaps by him. They are mentioned, 1 Sam. x. 5, 10; xix. 18—24; continued unto Ahab's time, 1 Kings xviii. 4; and seem to have had their principal establishments at Bethel and Jericho, 2 Kings ii. 2, 7. There was also a college of them at Jerusalem, 2 Kings xxii. 14. From them God for the most part selected those whom he purposed to endow with special gifts of the Spirit, their education having fitted them to become recipients of his extraordinary graces, by improvement of their natural faculties, and advancement in piety, through diligent instruction in the law and celebration of his praises, to which the study of music was subservient.—1 Sam. x. 5; and compare 1 Cor. xiv. 26. The more eminent prophets were sometimes chosen from among others, as, Amos vii. 14; but ordinarily the spirit of prophecy did not seize on any but such whose institution was in order to that end, so as to create surprise when it was otherwise. See 1 Sam. x. 12; xix. 24. Abridged from Stillingfleet's Orig. Sacr. b. ii. ch. iv.

We may recognise here the germ of those collegiate and scholastic establishments, which in our own country have been the strongholds of religious learning, and have produced so many ornaments of the church of Christ.

† 2 Kings ii. 9.

after he was taken away it would be too late either for Elisha to ask any thing, or for him to grant it ; reproving thereby the rashness of those who are in the habit of praying to the glorified saints, and of entreating their intercession, as is the dangerous practice in the Church of Rome. We should observe also upon this, that Elisha did not require a double portion of the Spirit, compared with that which his master had himself enjoyed, but only twice as much as was possessed by any of his remaining followers ; and even this Elijah pronounced to be a hard thing, but told him that if he was permitted to see him when he departed hence, he might assure himself that his request was granted. Accordingly, a chariot and horses of fire appeared to both of them ; and Elijah went up visibly in a whirlwind to heaven, leaving his mantle, with which he did his last mighty work, in the possession of Elisha, who forthwith, in the consciousness that God was with him, put it to the same use as before, by dividing with it the waters of Jordan, on his return to Jericho. The prophets there assembled, when informed of the event, showed at first symptoms of distrust, and made a three days' fruitless search for Elijah in the neighbourhood ; a search which Elisha had forewarned them would prove vain, though he permitted it to their importunity. Before quitting Jericho, Elisha performed a miracle of mercy, by healing its unwholesome waters ; and whilst on his way to Samaria, by way of Bethel, he showed that, no less than his departed master, he possessed the formidable power of executing the wrath of God upon the doers of evil, by the effects which followed his curse upon certain insolent children, who took occasion as he passed by their city to come forth and revile him ; when no less than two-and-forty were destroyed by two fierce bears, which came upon them out of the forest. That was

then showed to be most true, which we read in the book of Ecclesiasticus, that "the teeth of wild beasts were created for vengeance, punishing the wicked to destruction."* And from it we should learn to admire the merciful loving-kindness of our God, who, possessing such abundant means in every natural agent of chastising all of us for our misdeeds, is, nevertheless, "long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."†

Elisha, on his return to Samaria, found Jehoram, a younger son of Ahab, in possession of the throne, and in confederacy with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, whose desire of preserving a good understanding with Israel had induced him, to a certain extent, to admit even Ahaziah into a commercial league with him, and now to assist his less wicked brother in punishing the king of Moab, who had revolted from him, and refused to pay him tribute. The two kings, having marched against Moab by the way of the wilderness of Edom, found themselves in danger of perishing for want of water: in this emergency, while Jehoram contented himself with mere complaints, the more thoughtful and pious Jehoshaphat urged him to ask the assistance of Elisha, as a prophet of God. Elisha, having clearly made it understood that he interfered, not for the sake of Jehoram, but of Jehoshaphat, ordered them to cut trenches in the valley—assuring them, that without any perceptible rain or other natural cause, they should be filled with water. Having thus recovered their lost strength and courage, they were enabled to conquer the Moabites: though their desire of vengeance was turned into remorse and disgust, at witnessing the horrid sacrifice which the king of Moab made of his own eldest son to obtain the favour of

* Eccclus. xxxix. 30.

† 2 Pet. iii. 9.


his blood-stained idols—and they returned to their own land. Elisha, having left them, devoted himself for a season to works of a benevolent character, which the Spirit that had descended upon him enabled him to do beyond the ordinary course of nature. Several acts of this sort are successively recorded of him, each deserving of a brief notice. The first was, the miraculous multiplication of a poor widow's vessel of oil, by which he saved her two sons from being carried away as bondmen for the payment of her debts. The second, his intercession in behalf of an hospitable woman of Shunem, by which he obtained for her that which she had long hoped for in vain, a son, born in the old age of her husband. The third, a similar intercession for the restoration to life of that same boy which God was graciously pleased to grant to his earnest entreaty, though in the first instance it was refused, when he attempted to bring it about in a more negligent and easy manner, by sending merely his servant Gehazi to touch the child with his staff. There was perhaps something approaching to presumption in this mode of proceeding, which God rebuked by withholding for a time the expected miracle: but when the prophet went up, and lay upon the child, and strove as it were to impart unto him his own soul, when he prayed fervently, and was not discouraged, but repeated his efforts—then God heard him, and he was permitted to say with gladness to the anxious mother, "Take up thy son."* His fourth miracle was, by the mere admixture of a little meal into the mess of pottage which his disciples were eating, to prevent the deadly effects of some poisonous plant which had been inadvertently put into it. His fifth—bearing a striking resemblance to one of our Lord Christ's—to make twenty loaves of barley and

* 2 Kings iv. 36.

a little corn in the husk, serve as provision for a hundred men. His sixth, to heal Naaman, a great man in the service of the king of Syria, of a leprosy which afflicted him, by the simple bathing of his body in the waters of Jordan :—and to transfer it to his own servant Gehazi, who had imposed upon the generous Syrian, and obtained from him, under false pretences, a portion of those rich rewards which he had vainly offered to the prophet. His seventh, to cause the iron head of an axe, dropped into the water, to float upon its surface. These, with the single exception of Gehazi's leprosy, were all acts of kindness, and productive of benefit to men ; nor need we look upon even his merited chastisement as an exception, if, as most probably it did, it worked in him repentance for his avarice and falsehood, and amended his character in these important points. They were done, also, either in the quiet retirement of his own dwelling, or in those places of the country which were his usual resort, as being the abodes of his disciples.

But although dissatisfied with the conduct of his king, he was not therefore unmindful of his duties as a citizen and subject ; and when war broke out between Syria and Israel, he used the supernatural knowledge which he possessed in giving such intelligence of the enemy's movements to Jehoram, as baffled all their plans, and caused the king of Syria to make a desperate attempt to seize and punish him. Having first calmed the terrors of his servant, by showing him in a preternatural vision the mountain girt about with horses and chariots of fire for his protection, he led the blinded Syrians, who were sent to take him, into the midst of Samaria ; and, directing the king of Israel to let them return in safety, gave a sufficing proof how useless it was to assail by mortal arms one thus guarded by Heaven, or any whom he

might think it fitting to protect. The king of Syria, however, after a while forgot this wholesome lesson : he besieged Samaria, and reduced it to much distress through extremity of famine. While things were in this state, and Jehoram in his rage had sworn to kill Elisha, on whose help he had trusted as he supposed in vain, the prophet gave him, what from any other lips would have been the incredible promise, that by the next day the scarcity should be changed into the utmost plenty : a promise which was most amply made good, by the flight of the Syrians that very night, in consequence of a panic terror which came upon them from the Lord, and the abandonment of the camp with all its riches as a prey to the Israelites. The alarm with which the Syrians were infected, appears either to have caused them immediately to make peace with Israel, or at least to have inspired in them such reverence for the person of Elisha, that we next hear of him in Damascus, their capital city, and find him consulted by their king Benhadad, as to his recovery from a sickness which afflicted him. The messenger whom he sent to make this inquiry was Hazael, the captain of his host, the person who, as God had long before declared to Elijah, was destined to succeed him. Elisha, who while he looked him in the face foresaw not only the treacherous and wicked manner in which he would effect this, but also the horrible cruelties and evils which in the course of his reign he would inflict upon Israel, could not refrain from weeping while he gave him an answer to this effect,—that the king might indeed recover, but that he would surely die ; that is, his illness was not incurable, but his danger proceeded from another quarter, even from Hazael himself—who, learning from the prophet that he was to be king over Syria, after an hypocritical profession of abhorrence for the crimes he was about to commit, made haste to secure



the succession to himself, by murdering his master on the following day. Well might the prophet weep, on seeing such consequences arise from the communication which he felt himself compelled to make to this ambitious traitor: he felt, too, that he was preparing in him a scourge for the offences of his own people, and sorrowed, while he submitted himself to the will of God, to think that they needed so severe a punishment: his tears arose from a like cause with those which flowed from the eyes of Jesus, when he beheld the city of Jerusalem*—obstinate and careless of the future as it was—and mourned its certain doom. Let us remember that no country is ever vicious but through the vices of its individual inhabitants; and let us so walk, through the help of grace, that punishment may never fall upon it because of sins that we have committed.



CHAP. XXX.

THE HISTORY OF ELISHA.—PART II.

THE repentance of Ahab, incomplete as it appears to have been, so far prevailed with God as to procure for him a remission of one part of his sentence, that, namely, which involved the destruction of his family during his own life-time, but was not permitted to extend its beneficial effects beyond the limits of a single generation: "In his son's days," said the Lord to Elijah, "I will bring the evil on his house."† The time chosen for the execution of this threatened doom upon Jehoram, Ahab's son, and the

* Luke xix. 41.

† 1 Kings xxi. 29.

remainder of his family, was when the king, wounded in a battle fought at Ramah against Hazael, the new ruler of Syria, had left his army for a time, and lay sick at Jezreel; when also the king of Judah, Ahaziah, the good Jehoshaphat's unworthy grandson, who had so far imitated him as to join Jehoram against the Syrians, had come down to bear that monarch company during his illness, and, God so willing it, to share his fate.

The person selected to bring the Divine counsels to pass was a captain in Jehoram's army, Jehu by name: he had been formerly one of Ahab's body-guard, and in that capacity had ridden behind his master on the memorable day when he went to take possession of Naboth's vineyard; he therefore, as he afterwards reminded his companion Bidkar, had heard that sentence of destruction denounced upon the family of Ahab which it became now his duty to put in execution. The manner of doing it was as follows: Elisha the prophet despatched one of his young disciples to Ramoth-Gilead, where the army then lay, with a commission to anoint Jehu king over Israel, and to declare to him the work which God willed him to perform, namely, the utter destruction of all belonging to Ahab, in vengeance for the blood of his servants, which had been shed by that cruel tyrant, and by Jezebel his wife. The young man's action and message being made known by Jehu to the soldiers, they all with one consent proclaimed him king, and forthwith accompanied him on his hasty journey to assail Jehoram in Jezreel. Jehoram, being apprised of his coming, sent out messengers to meet him, and inquire his intentions. These messengers being successively detained by Jehu, the king himself went out, accompanied by Ahaziah of Judah, and encountered him, by a remarkable providence of God, in the very field of Naboth which Jezebel had

obtained for Ahab by perjury and murder. There Jehoram was slain by his rebellious subject, and on that very ground was his body cast out to lie ; while Ahaziah, who attempted to escape, was likewise overtaken and put to death ; and the haughty Jezebel, who retained her high and imperious spirit to the last, was thrown down from her palace by Jehu's order under the hoofs of his horses, trampled to death, and devoured by dogs, according to the prophecy of Elijah. Seventy more of Ahab's family, who were brought up in Samaria, were put to death by those who had the charge of them, and their heads sent to Jehu at Jezreel, as a token that his commands had been fulfilled ; and the work of death was carried on everywhere with unsparing precision, " till he had left him none remaining." * What an awful instance of God's just judgment is this ! how plainly do we here see that he is not to be mocked and braved with impunity ! How true is it, that the wicked, though he may appear to flourish and prosper for awhile, is at length cut off suddenly, and cometh to a fearful end ; and if there be any among us inclined to imitate the misdeeds of such a one, let him take timely warning from the picture of retribution here presented to him, and draw back while he may, lest he share also in *that*.

The acts of Jehu, as they regarded the destruction of Ahab's family, had been predicted, and were approved by God : he was told that he had " done well in executing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord." † Encouraged by this, he went on, as soon as he had fully obtained possession of the throne, to execute another branch of that which he justly conceived to be his duty, though the means which he adopted for bringing it to pass were not such as can

* 2 Kings x. 11.

† Ver. 30.

be applauded or justified. His object was to put down the idolatrous worship of Baal ; but, with this view, he publicly declared his intention to continue it : and having thus, under the pretence of holding a solemn festival in honour of the idol, got all the worshippers at once within his power, he sent in his soldiers among them, with a strict command to massacre them all. There was a meanness and treachery, as well as cruelty, about this act, which stamps an indelible disgrace upon the character of Jehu, and renders it astonishing that in doing it he should have obtained the countenance of so eminent a man as Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, whom we find assisting him in its performance.* But even good and well-meaning men are sometimes blinded, by their eagerness to effect some confessedly desirable object, to the unworthiness of the means by which they are led to attain it : they do not indeed say, "let us do evil that good may come," nevertheless they do it. Herein, therefore, seeing that this infirmity does exist in the human heart, it behoves us to be watchful, and to pray for God's spirit of judgment, that we may detect it if lurking in our own ; let us learn to consider, not only the end, but the means, and to discard whatever will not bear the touchstone of God's law from the one as well as from the other. Our zeal for God, unlike that of Jehu, should be sincere and without offence : it should not stoop to be guilty of any mean deceptions, nor should it ever set an occasion

* The Rechabites were originally Kenites by nation, descended from Hemath, styled in 1 Chron. ii. 55, the father of the house of Rechab. They appear to have been men of learning—those, at least, who were settled at Jabez. Jehonadab seems to have exercised great influence over them : his precepts were rigidly observed by his descendants down to the time of Jeremiah, who was divinely instructed to hold them up as an example of obedience to his rebellious countrymen. See Jerem. xxxv. It is said, but I do not know on what authority, that they exist as a tribe at this day.

of stumbling in our brother's way. It should be consistent also with itself, having no reservation in favour of some offences, while it runs to the extreme of strictness against others; a fault which likewise was observable in Jehu's character, who, though he abolished utterly the worship of Baal, yet permitted that of Jeroboam's golden calves to go on as usual: "he took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin."* Therefore, although, in consideration of the service he had done in rooting out the family of Ahab, a promise was made him, that "his children of the fourth generation should sit upon the throne of Israel,"† yet the glory and extent of the kingdom began to be diminished in his days; for all the country to the east of Jordan, the rich pasture lands of Gilead and Bashan, the patrimony of the Reubenites and Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, became a prey to Hazael, the enterprising king of Syria, who afterwards, in the reign of Jehoahaz his son, extended his ravages to the eastern portion of it also, and reduced the once formidable army of Israel to a weak remnant of fifty horsemen and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen.

The prayers of Jehoahaz, who showed in that respect, at least, his reliance upon God, obtained for him some relief from this condition of distress; and his son, Jehoash, also, after the death of Hazael, recovered from his successor, Benhadad, a portion of the cities of Israel, and would have accomplished more, had he been more active in obeying the directions given him by Elisha. That aged prophet was visited by the king of Israel, when he lay ill of the sickness of which he died; and as a symbolical

* 2 Kings x. 31.

† Ver. 30.

assurance of the victories which he might obtain over Syria, commanded him to take certain arrows in his hand and smite upon the ground. This the king, being indolent or unbelieving, did three times only, and stayed, receiving for such conduct a rebuke from Elisha, who told him that he had by it limited the number of his victories, which should be only three.

Syria was not the only enemy with whom Jehoaash had to deal; the king of Judah also warred against him, but not successfully: and we learn also, incidentally, that in his reign an invasion of the Moabites took place, for fear of whom some persons, who were engaged in burying a man, cast him in haste into the sepulchre of Elisha, and by a wonderful miracle, when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood upon his feet. It is to this event that allusion is made by the author of Ecclesiasticus, who, speaking of Elisha, says, "after his death his body prophesied,"* that is, it retained the miraculous power belonging to the prophets: as he goes on to explain it,—“he did wonders in his life, and at his death were his works marvellous.” Elisha, indeed, had been endued with a power of working miracles, inferior only to Moses and Elijah, and inferior to them not so much in their number as in their importance, many of those recorded of Elisha having been done simply for the benefit of private individuals, having apparently no great end in view, nor exercising any decided influence on the nation at large. Still there is no doubt but that his presence among them, as a recognised prophet of the Lord, and, as such, held in reverence both by kings and people, must have done much to restrain the Israelites from following those wicked courses to which they were but too prone when left for a moment to

* Eccclus. xlviii. 13, 14.

themselves: they needed the constant appearance of burning and shining lights, and whenever these were withdrawn, they fell back without reluctance into their former darkness. In this respect their prophets were all in all to them; for their kings, without exception, were not such as they could look up to for guidance or encouragement in any godly course: there is not one of them who departed from that prime temptation of Israel, the idolatrous worship of the calves of Bethel; not one who had the honesty to recall his people from their state of schism, and to point out to them Jerusalem as the place where they ought to worship, and the invisible God as the single object to whom, whether permitted to go up thither or not, their religious adoration ought to be invariably directed. When rulers forsake their main duty to the people—provision for the pure worship of God—can they, with any colour of reasonableness, complain if they in their turn should be forsaken of him? Still God is merciful and long-suffering, and though he afflicts and chastises again and again, it is long before he utterly casts off even those who are little amended by his reproofs.

Jeroboam, the son of Joash, was a king no better than his father. God, however, discerned some disposition in his people Israel to trust in him still, and blessed it by a decided interposition in their behalf, when oppressed by an invasion of the Hagarites and other eastern nations, who, as it would seem, had possessed themselves of a considerable portion of their land. "The Lord saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter, for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the Lord said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash."* On his

* 2 Kings xiv. 26, 27.

Syrian frontiers he recovered Damascus and Hamath for Israel;* while on the east of Jordan, the men of Reuben, and Gad, and Manasseh, "made war with the Hagarites, and Jetur, and Nephish, and Nodab; and they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them; for they cried to God in the battle, and he was entreated of them, because they put their trust in him." And "there fell down many of their enemies slain, because the war was of God." "And they dwelt in their steads until the captivity."† The records of these Israelitish victories may be transferred in a figure, as has been done by the apostle of Jesus, to our spiritual conflicts with the enemy of our souls: "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," St. Paul assures us, "but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds: we war not after the flesh," but through the Spirit which helpeth us, we are engaged in carrying on the battle within our own hearts, "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."‡ Such wars are indeed of God; and in them every Christian is engaged to serve at the time of his baptism, when he is "signed with the sign of the cross, in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end."§ Jeroboam the king, whose victories over the enemies of his country have led to these reflections, reigned forty-one years over Israel, and was succeeded on the throne by his son Zachariah, who occupied it for six months only, and was then cut off in a con-

* 2 Kings xiv. 28.

† 2 Cor. x. 4.

‡ 1 Chron v. 18—22.

§ Order of Public Baptism.

spiracy by Shallum, the son of Jabesh. He was the fourth of Jehu's line, and with him it ended. "This was the word of the Lord which he spake to Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation; and so it came to pass."* God will make good his promises, however unworthy and ungrateful they show themselves to whom they have been made; but he is not pledged to do more, and they who despise the riches of his liberality, and are evil because he is good, will find at last that there remaineth nothing for them but "a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour all the adversaries of God."† From which sad end may we through grace preserve ourselves, by taking earnest heed to the things which we have heard, and following their instructions with our whole heart.

CHAP. XXXI.

THE HISTORY OF JONAH.

WHEN Elijah and Elisha, the prophets of God, had been taken from the scene of their earthly labours, the former by a miraculous elevation into heaven, the latter by the ordinary process of death at a good old age, the Lord did not leave himself without a witness in the land of his adoption, but continued to raise up from time to time meet successors to those gifted men, less remarkably endowed indeed for the most part with the power of working

* 2 Kings xv. 12.

† Heb. x. 27.

wonders, but not less suited to the special duties which it was given them to perform under his authority and direction. Of these, Jonah, the son of Amittai, offers himself in the first place to our contemplation: that he lived in the times of which we have been speaking, is apparent from the fact, that when Jeroboam the son of Jehoash "restored the coast of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the plain," he did it "according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher."* Gath-hepher was a city of the tribe of Zebulun, situated in that district of country called afterwards Galilee of the Gentiles; a circumstance which, while it may serve to rebuke the ignorant malignity of those Pharisees, who out of their hatred to Christ, chose to affirm that "out of Galilee ariseth no prophet,"† was perhaps of importance in the case of Jonah, as tending to fit him, by familiarity with the manners and language of the heathen, for that extraordinary mission which God commanded him to undertake.

We have hitherto seen the prophets of God exclusively engaged in discharging their appointed duties within the limits of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, or at the most, like Elisha, at Damascus, paying a brief visit to some neighbouring land: but Jonah, by command of God, was sent upon a distant journey, to a city comparatively unknown; to great Nineveh upon the river Tigris, at that time the capital of the Assyrian empire; a city covering a vast extent of surface, and containing a great multitude of inhabitants, and also much cattle. Into this mass of human beings, engaged in all their various occupations, and indulging in all their luxurious vices,

* 1 Kings xiv. 25.

† John vii. 52.



in a state of undisturbed security, the prophet of Israel was commanded to go, with an announcement of God's vengeance : he was to declare to them their wickedness and its speedy punishment : " within forty days," he was to tell them, " Nineveh shall be overthrown."* It does not seem to have been fear of the consequences, likely to result to himself from the indignation of the people, to whom he carried such a message, which deterred Jonah from conveying it : his motive for drawing back seems rather to have been a persuasion, that God was too gracious and merciful ever to make good his threatenings against a set of men, however sinful, to such an extent as this ; and therefore that, if he declared to them their destruction, his prophecy would not come to pass, and he should be scorned, and perhaps punished, as having spoken falsely in the name of the Lord. Accordingly, instead of reverentially submitting himself to do his will, he went down to Joppa, and took his passage in a ship bound for Tarshish, intending to flee from the presence of the Lord. Observe, in this striking instance of Jonah's conduct, a truth which shows itself more or less in the history of all God's merely human agents, that in selecting them to do his work, he neither found nor made them perfect ; that they might possess the gift of prophecy, and many other supernatural endowments, consistently with a lamentable want as well of charity as of wisdom. This prophet, we may perceive, had his feelings of compassion and benevolence so deadened by self-love and vanity, that his fear was, not that millions of people should be swept from the face of the earth, but that they might not be so swept away, after he had prophesied that they should. He cared not how many perished, so that

* Jonah iii. 4.

the imputation of falsehood did not lie against him. And yet, though the whole strength of his excuse, such as it was, depended upon the merciful disposition of God, his conscience smote him with the guilt of disobedience, and he did not think himself secure from punishment, unless he could put himself out of his reach, by going down to Tarshish. What a strange notion does this give us of Jonah's opinions concerning the Almighty Being whose servant he professed himself to be ! or rather, what a warning is it, that our knowledge of God in all his infinite perfections, is rendered foolishness by the prevalence of our carnal will, when we suffer that to get the upper hand of us, and to urge us on in pursuit of the vain imaginations of an evil and deceitful heart. Jonah, perverse enough to refuse to do the bidding of God, because he was merciful—inconsistent enough to wish to flee from the presence of that merciful God—and foolish enough to imagine for a moment that it was possible to do so, presents but too faithful an image of many wise in their own conceits, who nevertheless are guilty in their daily conduct of all such perversity, and inconsistency, and folly ; who “observe lying vanities, and forsake their own mercy ;”* who fail to remember or to apply that important saying of the Psalmist in his address to God, “There is forgiveness with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared ;”† who forget that “if they take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the utmost parts of the sea, even there his hand shall lead them, and his right hand shall hold them.”‡ This lesson speedily was impressed, in a manner not to be resisted, upon Jonah's mind. The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest, so that the ship in which he was sailing was like to be broken.

* Jonah ii. 8. † Psalm cxxx. 4. ‡ Ibid. cxxxix. 9, 10.

The heathen sailors having vainly called upon their gods for help, awoke Jonah out of his sleep, and desired him to pray to his : proceeding at the same time to ascertain, by casting lots, for whose cause that evil was upon them. The lot having fallen upon Jonah, they asked him who he was, and from whence : and learning from his answer that he was a disobedient servant of the great Jehovah of Israel, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land, they feared greatly, and, though not without a creditable exhibition of much humane reluctance, they agreed to his own request, and cast him overboard into the sea, as the only means of calming its troubled waters, and saving their lives. The same Lord who had sent the tempest, caused it now to cease ; and while the mariners in grateful astonishment held on their course, he made a great fish, which he had brought thither for the purpose, swallow up Jonah, and retain him in this living prison for three days and nights. Feeling, no doubt, while in this extraordinary situation, how impossible it was for him to have remained alive for ever so short a time without the manifest interference of God's great power in his behalf, he offered up his prayer to him in hopeful confidence of release, and mingled it with thanksgiving, as though already set free.

In this respect, as well as in the period during which his confinement lasted, Jonah may be looked upon as a type of our Lord Jesus Christ : of him concerning whom David spake in language strikingly appropriate to the feelings with which Jonah was actuated, while composing his prayer,—“ I foresaw the Lord alway before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved : therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad ; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope : because, thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer

thine holy one to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance."* Compare with this the expressions of Jonah, " I cried, by reason of my affliction, unto the Lord, and he heard me ; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains ; the earth, with her bars, was about me for ever ; yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God. I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving. Salvation is of the Lord."† We have here not only a similarity of sentiment, but of expression also ; a similarity which might, I think, of itself have attracted our attention, even had we been without any positive assurance that Jonah was actually a type of Christ. But this we know he was, from no less certain an authority than the mouth of our Lord himself, who, when urged by some of the obstinately unbelieving Pharisees to show them a sign, replied, " An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas : for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."‡ This declaration of Christ concerning himself was brought to pass by his resurrection from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion ; and to his resurrection it is that the words of David already repeated were applied by St. Peter in his celebrated discourse upon the day of Pentecost, where he says that " David, being a prophet, spake this of the resurrection of Christ,

* Psalm xvi. 8—11. Acts ii. 25—28. † Jonah ii. 2, 4, 6, 9.

‡ Matt. xii. 39.

that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption ;”* and thus is justified the language of our creed, where it professes that Christ, having been crucified, dead, and buried, descended into hell, and rose again the third day from the dead. On the third day, in like manner, it appears, from the history of Jonah, he was thrown again out of his miraculous place of detention, upon the dry land : and being now convinced of the necessity of obedience, as well as filled with gratitude for God’s mercy towards him, he forthwith proceeded on his journey towards Nineveh, urged onward by a renewed command from the Lord ; and having entered into the city a day’s journey, being only a third part of its prodigious extent, he preached unto it the preaching which God had bidden him, being to the effect that within forty days from that time it should be destroyed.† The consequences ensued which he had already foreseen : the people of Nineveh believed him, and did all in their power, from the least unto the greatest, to avert, by every expression of penitential sorrow, this terrible calamity. They had doubtless heard, either from Jonah himself, or from some of his companions, his wonderful restoration from the jaws of death ; he was, Christ tells us, “ a sign unto the Ninevites,”—even as he was himself a sign to the Jewish people ; but with a far different effect—for “ the men of Nineveh,” he declared, “ shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold a greater than Jonah is here.”‡ The power and grace of God, which showed themselves so evidently in the treatment of the prophet, procured for him, on the part of the Ninevites, a reverential belief in the message that he was commanded to bring them, and

* Acts ii. 30, 31.

† Jonah iii. 2, 4.

‡ Luke xi. 30, 32.

yet encouraged a hope that, in consideration of their sincere repentance, it might not be carried into effect. The same power and grace of God, displayed yet more strikingly in the resurrection of Jesus, were urged by his apostles in vain to the Jews, as inducements to believe him, and to forsake their sins : therefore the wrath came upon them to the uttermost, and that destruction, which was averted from Nineveh by its repentance, became their dreadful doom. Let us not be high-minded, but fear : "for if God spared not the natural branches," the people of his ancient choice, but cut them off when they became unfruitful, "take heed," says the apostle, "lest he also spare not thee."*

While the Ninevites fasted and prayed, and were in all the agony of uncertainty, as to the final determination of God, Jonah, having delivered his message, quitted the city, and established himself on a spot at a short distance from it, in order to see the end. God's dealings with him, though they had done him much good, had not altogether overcome that exclusive attention to his own reputation as a prophet which had led him astray before. When the forty days were expired, and all things went on in their usual order ; when he found that God had indeed listened to the fervent prayers of the Ninevites, and had repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and done it not ; instead of joining in their grateful thanksgiving to the Lord for his great mercy, Jonah was exceedingly displeased, and very angry. He wished to die, so mortified was he, because his prophecy had not come to pass. He wished to die, also, being thoroughly vexed, and out of temper with himself, and all things else, for another and a most trifling cause : because a plant of the gourd kind, which had

* Rom. xi. 21.

grown up over the place where he used to sit, and refreshed him by its shadow, had suddenly withered, and was dead. This had been the work of God, who intended out of it to draw materials for a mild rebuke of the wayward prophet, and to set before him in the most striking light his uncharitable frame of mind. "Doeſt thou well to be angry? Thou haſt had pity on the gourd, for the which thou haſt not laboured, neither maदेſt it grow; which came up in a night, and periſhed in a night: and ſhould not I ſpare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than ſixſcore thouſand perſons that cannot diſcern between their right hand and their left hand, and alſo much cattle?"* So true is it that the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercy is over all his works: the little infants who have not yet attained the uſe of their reaſon, the brute animals which are endowed with none, are all cared for, and remembered for good, and weighed in the balance of his righteous judgments: he is the great Husbandman, who has laboured for them, and has made them grow; they are the plants which he has planted, and he watches over them with a care proportioned to their uſefulneſs, and to the place which they occupy among the beings of his creation. Not even a ſparrow, as his Son hath told us, falleth to the ground unheeded by him; how much more, then, muſt he deſire the eternal life and happineſs of thoſe who are of more value than many ſparrows; of thoſe to whom he has given capacities to know and love him, and, being conformed to the image of their holy Saviour, to riſe like him from the vanquiſhed grave, and rejoice in his ſalvation for ever in heaven!


* Jonah iv. 4, 9—11.

CHAP. XXXII.

KINGS OF JUDAH. JOASH—AMAZIAH—UZZIAH.

HAVING brought down the history of the kingdom of Israel to the death of the last sovereign of the line of Jehu, to whom, in reward for his services against the house of Ahab, it was promised that his children of the fourth generation should sit upon its throne, it becomes necessary that we should now go back to the period when those services were performed, with a view to trace downwards from thence the course of events, which, during the reigns of himself and his descendants, were going on in the kingdom of Judah.

Its king Ahaziah had been put to death at the same time with Jehoram, whom he was visiting in his sickness, by the command of Jehu ; who, not content with this, slew likewise as many of his kinsfolk as fell within his power. But the heaviest blow inflicted upon the royal house of Judah at this time, was by one of its own members : Athaliah, the mother of the deceased king, who appears to have inherited all the wickedness of her parents, Ahab and Jezebel, regardless of every plea of kindred, and steeling her heart against the tender feelings of womanly and motherly affection, arose with the intention of destroying every remaining individual of the seed royal, and seating herself upon the vacant throne. One infant, however, was preserved by the providence of God, acting by means of two of his faithful servants, Jehoiada the high priest, and his wife Jehosheba, and was concealed among the buildings of the temple for six years from the cruelty of Athaliah. At the end of that time, Jehoiada, having first privately arranged the method of proceeding with some of the chiefs



of the Levites and of the army, whom he judged fit to be entrusted with his secret, brought forth the boy Joash into the temple, and there publicly proclaimed him king. Athaliah learning it, hastened to the place, to put down, if possible, the conspiracy: but she soon found that her usurped authority was departed from her, and that the rightful heir to the throne of Judah was joyfully accepted by the people. She reaped accordingly the just reward of her deeds, being hurried forth from the holy place, and put to a speedy death. She seems during her six years' reign to have devoted herself to the worship of Baal, and to have caused God's temple to be robbed of its most valuable possessions, to ornament and enrich the idol. This the good Jehoiada was compelled to suffer for a time, in the hope of one day obtaining a most ample reparation: and now, the guardianship of Joash being naturally his duty, he laboured to instill into the mind of the young king a proper reverence for the true religion, and had the satisfaction of observing, that the good seed had been sown by him in a soil which promised to bring forth abundant fruit. Into so great a degree of supineness, however, and neglect of holy things, had the nation sunk during the prevalence of idolatry, that the king's pious design for the complete repair of the house of God, appears to have been scarcely, if at all, seconded by his people, or even by those who ought to have been the foremost in promoting so good a work, the priests and Levites. Unwillingness to go out of their way to put themselves to trouble, or to consider how much the thing to be done will tend to their eternal benefit, is the constant bar to all virtuous exertion among all classes and degrees of men. In great emergencies it is not enough that men should think rightly, they must act rightly too.—Joash "was minded"*

* 2 Chron. xxiv. 4.

that the house of God should be repaired, and yet for three-and-twenty years nothing was done, because he did not show that zeal and activity in enforcing his wishes, which might have set his subjects to work. When at last, his patience being exhausted, he took the direction of the matter into his own hands, the necessary contributions soon came in, and the work was executed speedily and well. Though the men of Judah had shown indolence in beginning this operation, it is due to them to remark another quality which they displayed in carrying it on, and that a precious one, namely, honesty. The persons who had the charge of the money, it is said, "reckoned not with the men into whose hands they delivered it to be bestowed on workmen; for they dealt faithfully."* The many injunctions contained in the law of Moses to be true and just in all their dealings had produced their desired effect upon these Jewish builders: shall not the still higher motives of our better covenant produce a like effect on us, in every matter which we put our hands unto to do? Shall we ever take advantage of the ignorance or the inexperience of our neighbour, to obtain from him any thing which is not ours by right? Shall our rejoicing be ever other than this, the testimony of our conscience, that "with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world?"†

Although in repairing the Lord's house, the high priest had not altogether shown that zeal and energy which might have been expected from so eminent a person, yet certain it is, that he did good service to his nation, by regulating and controlling, so long as he lived, the mind of the king, who, we are told,

* 2 Kings xii. 15.

† 2 Cor. i. 12.

“did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada.”* After his death, we are presented with a far different and most distressing picture: we see Joash yielding to the treacherous persuasions of his princes, quitting the worship of the true God, and serving groves and idols ;† we see him, like a tyrant, resenting the freedom of Zechariah in reproving him for this, though he spoke by immediate inspiration from above, and causing him to be put to a cruel death by stoning, between the temple and the altar : thus polluting the very building he had repaired for God with the blood of his chosen servant, thus showing the blackest ingratitude towards the man who had saved him in his infancy from the murderer’s sword, by sacrificing his son to the rash impulse of his unrighteous anger. “The Lord look upon it, and require it,”‡ were the last words of the dying martyr: the Lord did look upon it, and did require it. The Syrian army, which came up at the end of the year, and, small though it was, overcame the whole power of Judah, and laid a heavy tribute on Jerusalem, is said, by the sacred writer, in so doing, “to have executed judgment upon Joash,”§ and when they were departed from him, leaving him in great diseases, his own servants conspired against him, for the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died. It has been observed also, that from the time of this murder of Zechariah, the kingdom of Judah began to show symptoms of weakness, and to decline ; being frequently overrun by foreign invaders, until the days arrived of its complete subjection by a people of whom as yet they had not heard. The conspiracy against Joash prevailed so far as to take his life, but not so as to prevent his son Amaziah from succeeding

* 2 Chron. xxiv. 2.

† Ver. 22.

‡ Ver. 18.

§ Verses 24, 25.

him—who accordingly, when he was settled on the throne, made use of his authority in the first instance to punish his father's murderers. He showed, however, that he was actuated in so doing by principles of justice rather than of passion, by limiting his punishment to the offenders themselves, and not extending it, as was too much the custom of those times, to their innocent children. This milder conduct, we are told, he adopted with reference to a passage in the law of Moses, where it is said, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin."* It is important that we should bear in mind this passage to enable us better to understand that which occurs in the second commandment, and represents God as visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation *of them that hate him*, where there is danger, lest the last words being overlooked, God should be considered by some as punishing the innocent for the guilty; whereas, it is only to them that hate him in any case that the punishment is meant to be applied, and the expression should be taken as conveying an assurance that He will persevere in inflicting it upon those who persevere in the imitation of their forefathers' sin.†

* 2 Chron. xxv. 4. Deut. xxiv. 16.

† This doctrine is distinctly laid down in the 18th chapter of the Prophet Ezekiel. Nevertheless, according to the order of natural consequences which God has established for the conduct of worldly affairs, serious disadvantages do perpetually result to the children of bad parents, in the forms of disease, poverty, disrepute, and contamination of morals, besides "the fault and corruption in the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam." These, however, are all remediable evils, and, howsoever mysterious portions of God's ways may appear to us, let us remember always that *they are His ways*, and lay our hand upon our mouth. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

Amaziah, who appears to have possessed a quality of all others the most hazardous to the welfare of his people—a great desire for military glory, determined to make war upon the Edomites, and thinking his own army not sufficient, had hired another from the neighbouring country of Israel, consisting of an hundred thousand men. Of their assistance, however, he was deprived, by a strict injunction from one of God's prophets, to send them back, if he did not wish to be defeated by his enemies,—for the Lord was not with Israel.* Never let us think to strengthen ourselves in any of our undertakings, by forming connexions and companionships with wicked men. An apostle has declared, in strict conformity with the example of Amaziah, that the friendships of this world are enmity with God;† that is, if they are formed only upon worldly principles, and for worldly objects—if his approval of them is not looked to, or thought a matter of indifference, then we may be sure that it will never be bestowed. Amaziah, though grieved for the loss of his hundred talents of silver, which he had given to the men of Israel, obeyed the prophet, and gained, for his obedience, a great victory over Edom. Of this he made a cruel use, by putting many of the inhabitants to death; and then, hearing that the soldiers of Israel, whom he had sent back, being much offended at his conduct, had done damage to the country through which they passed, and his heart being lifted up by his recent success, he sent a challenge to the king of Israel, to meet him in battle. Here he found an opponent as proud and more powerful than himself: Joash, the king of Israel, at first refused even to condescend so far as to go out against him, sending him a contemptuous answer, in which he compared himself to the

* 2 Chron. xxv. 7.

† James iv. 4.

cedar in Lebanon, and Amaziah to a despicable thistle, vain enough to think itself a fit match for the lofty cedar, and weak enough to be trodden down by the foot of any passing animal. At last, being further pressed by Amaziah, Joash did go forth, and gave him a complete defeat; he brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and plundered its temple. These very men of Israel with whom it had been so lately said, that the Lord was not, were now victorious over Judah,—and why? because Judah had sinned, since their conquest of Edom, in the grossest manner, by becoming worshippers of Edom's gods, and because a prophet, sent to warn them of their folly, had been dismissed, by Amaziah, with the irreverent answer, "Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldst thou be smitten?"* It matters little how great and powerful, how fully provided with worldly means men are, if they refuse to listen to the word of God: if the religious principles, with which they might acquaint themselves and will not, fail to guide their actions, those actions will bring them nothing but discomfiture in the end. Amaziah lived on for a while in dishonour, and then fell a victim to a conspiracy, as had his father Joash: and as then, so in the present instance, the people were unwilling to transfer the crown to any other family but that of David, and made his son, the young Uzziah, their king. The reign of this prince was long, and for the most part prosperous and successful: he seems to have had the advantage of an able instructor, whose name was Zechariah, and as long as he lived, the king, we are told, sought God, and received the reward of all those who diligently seek him.† He repaired the defences of Jerusalem, which had been broken down in consequence of his father's presump-

* 2 Chron. xxv. 16.

† 3 Chron. xxvi. 5.

tion ; he kept on foot a numerous and well-appointed army, which he used with effect against the Philistines, the old enemies of his nation ; and his fame was spread abroad even unto Egypt, and among the children of Ammon, who brought him gifts. He does not, however, seem to have been led astray by that wild thirst for reputation in war, which had been the failing of his father Amaziah : he looked to other and purer sources of national prosperity ; and remembering the words of Solomon, " the profit of the earth is for all, the king himself is served by the field,"* he betook himself to encourage and to practise the arts of its cultivation. He " digged many wells, for he had much cattle, both in the low country and in the plains ; husbandmen also, and vine-dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel ; for he loved husbandry."† Happy had it been for him, had he continued throughout his life to employ himself in occupations like these : but it was otherwise ; an unlawful desire came upon him, urging him to interfere in that office which was the priests' alone, by burning incense upon the altar in the temple of the Lord. The high priest and his brethren did all that lay in their power to dissuade and hinder him from his rash attempt ; but he disregarded their words, and while on the point of putting his profane purpose into execution, was stricken with leprosy by God. Hastily, and overcome by a sense of his transgression, he retired from the holy place to his own home, where he passed the rest of his days in a state of mournful solitude, his son Jotham ruling in his stead. Let his example teach us to mind our own business, and not presumptuously to intrude into any office to which we are not appointed, least of all into that holy ministry of the priesthood, to which no persons can be considered

* Eccles. v. 9.

† 2 Chron. xxvi. 10.

“as lawfully called and sent, unless they have been chosen to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord’s vineyard;”^{*} and who, in that branch of the Church Catholic established in England, are its Bishops alone.

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CHAP. XXXIII.

HISTORY OF AHAZ—PROPHECY OF ISAIAH. RUIN OF ISRAEL.

THE period of Jewish history at which we are now arrived, is remarkable for an extraordinary outpouring of the spirit of prophecy upon holy men, in the kingdoms as well of Israel as of Judah. Hosea and Amos in the former country, and Joel and Micah in the latter, began about this time to declare things to come, while the most celebrated of them all, who, as a mark of distinction, has been called the evangelical prophet, or prophet of the gospel, Isaiah, the son of Amos, has pointed to the time at which he probably first received his inspiration from heaven, by recording a vision of God in his holy temple, which he saw in the year that king Uzziah died. The song of the seraphim which he heard on that solemn occasion, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory,”<sup>†</sup> was again listened to after an interval of more than eight hundred years by the apostle St. John : and to this hour the Christian Church in the most sacred ordinances of its religious service, has adopted that hymn of praise, acknowledging the establishment of God’s kingdom upon earth, and testifying

\* Article xxiii.

† Isaiah vi. 1—3.

its anxiety that his will may be done there, as it is in heaven. In this vision also, it receives, with the deep awe befitting such a subject, the revealed mystery of the Holy Trinity: it recognises in the Lord Jehovah sitting on his throne, the persons, not of the Father alone, but of the Son also, and of the Spirit. Of the Son, because we read in St. John's gospel, that "These things said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spake of him:"\* and of the Spirit, because we have the assurance of St. Paul in his address to the Jews at Rome, contained in the last chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, that it was the Holy Ghost which spake by Isaiah the prophet unto their fathers, saying, "Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive;"† which words were addressed to Isaiah‡ upon the occasion in question: and it looks accordingly upon the threefold repetition of the word—Holy, holy, holy, applied to the Lord of Sabaoth, as bearing an especial reference to the mystery of the three Persons and one God. The purport of the prophecy contained in this vision, was to point out the long-continued obstinacy and hardness of heart which should be the character of the Jewish people unto the latest times, always excepting, however, a certain remnant, "a tenth,"§ consecrated as it were to God, which should believe and be saved, a "holy seed," preserving in it a substantial principle of life, capable of reviving and flourishing anew at his good pleasure. The prophecy itself, like that to which it relates, contains within the shortest possible compass, that which, being expanded, forms the whole book of God—the dealings of the Lord Jehovah by his Son and Spirit with his people; and I have therefore dwelt upon it a little longer now, because the whole history of the

\* John xii. 41.

† Isaiah vi. 9, 10.

‡ Acts xxviii. 25—27.

§ Ver. 13.

world that follows, goes to explain and to confirm it : the casting away of Israel has been the reconciling of the world, and it remains that the receiving of them again shall be, as St. Paul expresses it, "life from the dead."\*

The first great infliction of God's wrath upon his rebellious people, was drawing near at the time when king Uzziah died, and this prophecy was delivered : the kingdom of Israel, or of the ten tribes, had provoked him most by their continual idolatries and transgressions, and upon their heads the punishment was destined first to fall. Pekah, the son of Remaliah, was then their king : he had obtained the throne by the murder of Pekahiah, son of Menahem ; which Menahem had also murdered his predecessor Shallum, an equally blood-stained usurper with himself, and had been compelled, during his cruel and inglorious reign, to weigh down his people with taxes, in order to prevent, by payment of tribute, the attacks of a new enemy, the king of Assyria. This powerful nation, of which the only mention hitherto had been in the preaching of Jonah to the Ninevites, was destined henceforth to be the scourge, and after no long time the destruction of Israel : on the present occasion, however, they were bought off by the gifts of Menahem, and departed for a time. Pekah instead of profiting of this period of respite, by turning in penitence to the Lord his God, went on in the old courses, which now seemed habitual to the kings of Israel ; and, urged by that unnatural enmity which the ten tribes seem constantly to have born against their brethren of Judah, entered into a confederacy with Rezin, king of Syria, and marched against Jerusalem. Ahaz, the king of Judah, who had lately succeeded his father Jotham, a righteous prince, was

\* Rom. xi. 15.

himself of a far different character ; God therefore determined to punish him, and his people who walked in his ways, by the hands of these his enemies : they gained several victories over him, and at length forced him to retreat into Jerusalem, to which they prepared to lay siege. Thus far God suffered them to vex Judah, but as it was not his purpose as yet to overthrow it entirely, he sent Isaiah his prophet to Ahaz, with a message of consolation, requesting him also to ask a sign, as a proof that what he promised should come to pass. This Ahaz, probably disbelieving the prophet altogether, but willing to justify his contempt of him, by an assumed reverence for God, refused to do, saying, " I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And Isaiah said, Hear ye now, O house of David, is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also ?" \* (We see here, that they who make excuses and accept not that which God freely offers, are said to weary, that is, to displease him : let us apply this to his offers of all the means of grace, to opportunities of public worship, of hearing his word, of receiving the blessed sacrament of his Son's body and blood, and gratefully avail ourselves of these, and all other his great bounties towards us.) The prophet went on to say, " Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign ; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel : butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know (or rather—when he shall know) to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." † To Ahaz and the men of Judah, the importance of this sign consisted in its fixing the time within which they might expect

\* Isaiah vii. 12, 13.

† Verses 14—16.

deliverance : it was verified in the family of Isaiah himself, who being then about to marry a young woman whom he calls a prophetess, was to have a son ; and before that son had arrived at a sufficient age to discern good from evil, the two kings, Pekah and Rezin, should both be overthrown, and Judah rescued from their power : and so it came to pass. But an apostle of Christ has informed us that in these words there was also couched a deeper and more hidden meaning ;\* a meaning to be made apparent only by the event, when God sent his only Son into the world to be incarnate of a virgin mother ; when Jesus was born, to save his people, not from their temporal enemies, but from their sins ; when the true bearer of the name Emmanuel appeared upon the earth, and God was indeed with us in the person of his Christ. The same spirit of prophecy which thus announced by Isaiah the incarnation of Christ, enabled him to detail also certain other particulars concerning that wondrous child. The places where many of his mightier works would be performed, are pointed out : the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, Galilee of the Gentiles, where the people which sat in darkness would see a great light, where upon them that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, light would spring up.† The attributes of majesty and titles of glory which he should enjoy, are also stated ; “ unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder : and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice,

\* Matt. i. 21—23.

† Isaiah ix. 1. Matt. iv. 15.



henceforth even for ever."\* He was not only to sit on David's throne, but to arise out of his house and lineage: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth."† And while Isaiah was thus foretelling the birth, condition, and character of the Son promised by God as the great ruler of his people, information as to the very place in which he should be born, was supplied to them by the prophet Micah: "But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth."‡

With these assurances of divine protection and future glory, did God think fit to sustain the faith of those who still honoured his name in Judah, at a time when the nation seemed on the point of utter destruction: when their enemies had greatly overcome them, and carried away no less than two hundred thousand of them to Samaria. It pleased him also to give an immediate earnest of his merciful loving-kindness and good will towards them, by causing the restoration of all these unhappy captives to the bosom of their respective families. I have already stated, that in spite of the many provocations of the ten tribes, he still continued his prophets among them,

\* Isaiah ix. 6.

† Ibid. xi. 1.

‡ Micah v. 2—4.

of which, two, Hosea and Amos, have left sufficient proof in their writings. In the present instance, however, he commissioned neither of these, but another prophet named Oded, to remonstrate with the men of Israel, both on the cruelties they had already committed, in slaying so many of their brethren of Judah ; and on that which they still meditated, in making bond-slaves of their captives. The Israelites, whose hearts were not wholly hardened, acted, on this occasion, like true servants of God : they acknowledged their offence, and took speedy means to repair it : they rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and so brought them back into their own land.\* Let us profit by the wholesome example here set before us, teaching us what we ought to do, whenever we are convinced, either by our own consciences, or the admonition of others, that we have done wrong : instant repentance, immediate retracing of our steps, and, if the wrong be done to a fellow-creature, full restitution and amends to him, we may here learn to be our duty : and may God put it into our hearts to practise it with sincerity, whenever need shall be. The good action which these men did is, no doubt, remembered in heaven to the everlasting benefit of their souls : but their days as a nation were numbered, and now fast drawing to a close. Ahaz, the wicked king of Judah, looking only to his own security, and unconsciously executing the counsels of the Lord, whom he despised, sent presents of money to the king of Assyria, obtained by sacrilegious plunder of the temple, to induce him to declare war against Damascus and Israel, the two

\* 2 Chron. xxviii. 15.

enemies whom he mostly feared. Tiglath Pileser, then king of Assyria, accepted his gifts, and sent forth an army against Damascus, which took it. There Ahaz went to visit him, and probably to concert their further plans for the overthrow of Israel, where Pekah had been put to death by Hosea, son of Elah, their last king, as wicked as all the rest. While there, Ahaz showed his weak mind, and idolatrous disposition, more plainly than ever: he had before sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, because he thought them more powerful than his own; and now happening to see the fashion of one of their altars, which pleased him, he caused such a one to be made at Jerusalem, and used there for the daily sacrifices, in defiance of the law of Moses, while he perverted the proper altar which had been there before, to the purposes of his own superstitions. For he was, as most weak and foolish men are, fond of fortune-tellers, and star-gazers, and similar imposers upon the credulity of those who have not God before their eyes;\* and the dial which it is mentioned that he made, though useful in itself, was very probably meant by him for some such absurd and forbidden purpose. In these evil ways he walked to the hour of his death, not living to see the result of his alliance with Assyria, though in reality the fulfilment of God's threatenings against the ten tribes of Israel, in their overthrow and captivity. At length, the measure of their guilt was full, and their overthrow, long before announced, took place five years after the death of Ahaz, when Shalmaneser the Assyrian took Samaria, and carried Israel away captive, and placed them in Halah and in Habor, by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.


\* Isaiah viii. 19; ix. 16.



Thus ended the kingdom of the ten tribes, or of Israel; a kingdom which, ever since its first establishment by Jeroboam, the author of its revolt and sin, had constantly displeased the Lord, rejecting the warnings of his prophets, making flesh their arm, and provoking him by their schismatical and idolatrous offences. "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight:"\* a few may have returned at a later period to the land again; but the great bulk of them remained in a state of dispersion among the heathen, and probably still remain unto this very day. We are taught by prophecy to look forward to a time, when they shall be restored to the favour of God, and to the inheritance of his chosen; when "He shall set up an ensign to the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel," as well as "gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth;" when "the Redeemer shall come from Zion, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."† We are taught to entreat of God this happy consummation, when we say unto him, in the words of that Redeemer, "Thy kingdom come:" it behoves us, then, not to boast ourselves against that now fallen, but once beloved people, and hereafter to be again beloved,‡ but to pity and befriend them when we have the power; shunning, through God's grace, the sins which caused their overthrow, and trusting in the mercy through Christ, which must be to all who would be saved, our common dependence at the last.

\* 2 Kings xvii. 18. † Isa. xi. 12; lix. 20. Rom. xi. 26.

‡ Rom. ix. 23.



## CHAP. XXXIV.

## HISTORY OF HEZEKIAH.

WHILE God, by the hand of the Assyrians, was putting in execution his long-threatened vengeance upon the ten tribes of Israel, for their manifold sins, the kingdom of Judah was enjoying an interval of tranquillity, and turning it to a good and religious account, under the direction of their new sovereign, the pious Hezekiah. This prince, we are told, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord, which had been shut against his worshippers during the latter part of the wicked reign of his father Ahaz; and, finding it not only stripped of its holy ornaments, but, as might be expected, in a state of filthiness and dilapidation, immediately exerted himself, with the whole weight of his royal authority, to remedy this great and crying evil. ~~He called together the priests and Levites, laid upon them his urgent commands to~~ sanctify, without delay, both themselves and the temple, and when all this was done, commemorated the purification by a solemn sacrifice, at which the instruments of religious music, ordained by David, but silenced by his degenerate descendant Ahaz, gave forth again their notes of holy melody, and they whose duty and privilege it was, sang praises again with gladness. The spirit which then animated Hezekiah and his people, was a spirit which we have reason to believe, while the great Protector of his Church watches over it on earth, will never fail from the hearts of his servants: every congregation of true christian worshippers will feel a decent pride in seeing the holy building wherein they meet for the purposes of worship, in a suitable condition for the

indwelling of their Lord: they will rejoice to witness his service carried on within it in an orderly and decorous manner, and will themselves contribute to that end, by joining in such parts of it, whether of prayer or psalmody, as are allotted to them by its regulations.

“ Lord, how delightful 'tis to see,  
A whole assembly worship thee !  
At once they sing, at once they pray,  
They hear of heaven and learn the way.”

The zeal for God's worship by which the good king of Judah was actuated, did not suffer him to rest content with a reformation of his own people only, but prompted him to extend to the ten tribes also, who were not as yet carried away captive, an invitation to repent of their schism, and to meet at Jerusalem, for the purpose of celebrating, as a nation united at least in religion, if in no other respect, the festival of the Passover. He had, however, the mortification of finding, that with a few exceptions only, his proposal was treated with contempt and mockery, ~~their ignorance of the solemn ordinance, by coming unsanctified according to the law of Moses, and thus eating the Passover in a forbidden manner.~~ *they generally showed* their ignorance of the solemn ordinance, by coming unsanctified according to the law of Moses, and thus eating the Passover in a forbidden manner. For these, however, Hezekiah prayed, in the confident assurance that God would accept the good intention and desire to return to the right way which they had showed, although, through long disuse, they knew not what it was. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and pardoned their involuntary offence. For that which he demands, above all things, of those who come to him, is the preparation of the heart; the sincere willingness of the uninstructed to learn of him; the sincere determination, when instructed, to put his lessons in practice; and the humble trust and prayer, that he “ will forgive us all our sins, negligences,

and ignorances, and endue us with the grace of his Holy Spirit, to amend our lives according to his holy word."\*

The worship of the living and true God, which Hezekiah laboured to establish, was inconsistent, as he well knew, with the toleration of idols; these, accordingly, he utterly destroyed within the limits of his own dominions; and the disturbed state of the kingdom of Israel, now on the point of being overwhelmed by the Assyrians, enabled him to effect somewhat as to their abolition in that country also. But the measure of Israel's iniquity as a nation being now filled up, by their last scornful rejection of Hezekiah's invitation to an act of religious worship, they were led away, as I have already mentioned, into captivity, and their land re-peopled by a mixed multitude from various countries under the sway of the Assyrian empire. These people were all idolaters of various sorts, and God, willing to bring about some reformation among them, afflicted them with a plague of lions, which ~~evil they attributing to their~~ of the God of the land, sought to ward off, by procuring from the captive Israelites a priest to instruct them. This priest came and dwelt at Bethel, and gave them such instruction as he could; but being himself but an unauthorized teacher, and brought up, not at the house of God, but in the rebellious kingdom of Israel, the result of his directions appeared only in this, that they feared the Lord and worshipped him after an imperfect manner, not forsaking their own peculiar idols, but uniting their service to that of God. Far different would have been their conduct, if they had followed the example of Hezekiah, or desired a priest from him—every thing appertaining to idolatrous worship in Judah he had so utterly abolished, that he

\* Litany.

even brake in pieces the brazen serpent which Moses had made, and which had hitherto been carefully preserved, as a precious memorial of the days of old, because he found that the people had begun to look upon it with superstitious veneration, and to burn incense unto it—while the priests he had recalled, not only to the enjoyment of their ancient rights, but to the punctual discharge of their appointed duties, of which one not the least important was, “to teach Jacob God’s judgments, and Israel his law.”\* The new inhabitants of the land of Israel, however, adopted a different course, and in the state of mixed religions which that course produced, they remained between three and four hundred years; at the expiration of which time a certain change took place in their condition, hereafter to be noticed. We have as yet considered Hezekiah, only as a man highly favoured of God to be his instrument in bringing about a great work of religious reformation; and to this end he was suffered to enjoy, during the first fourteen years of his reign, a state of tranquillity, interrupted only by ~~this prosperous war against the Philistines,~~ concerning which we have a prophecy of Isaiah,† delivered at the time when he succeeded to the kingdom. But now his constancy of faith in that same God was to be put to a ruder trial: Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, urged by that insatiable lust of wealth and dominion, which causes a vast proportion of the miseries endured in this world, demanded of him the payment of tribute, and upon his bold refusal, invaded his land. Unable to resist this formidable enemy, who took one after another the fenced cities of Judah, Hezekiah lost heart, and endeavoured, after the example of his father Ahaz, to purchase the good will of the Assyrians at the expense of those treasures and

\* Deut. xxxiii. 10.      † Isaiah xiv. 29.

ornaments of the temple, with which he had so lately beautified it. This timid and unworthy conduct carried with it its own punishment: the king of Assyria received the money, but did not in any degree forego his hostile intentions, and sent the bulk of his army, under the command of Rabshakeh, with instructions to besiege and destroy Jerusalem. Thus attacked by the very weapons which he had himself supplied to his enemy, disappointed of obtaining any help from Egypt, sensible of the greatness of his danger, and wounded to the heart by the proud reproachful speeches which Rabshakeh, in the confidence of a speedy triumph, had uttered against the God of Israel, Hezekiah, seeing at last the vanity of any human means of deliverance, betook himself to the sure resource of appealing to his Divine Protector with fervent prayer. He had received a scornful letter from the king of Assyria, and he took it up with him into the temple, and spread it before the Lord, entreating the great avenger of Israel to vindicate his insulted majesty from the injurious aspersions contained therein, which went to level him with the idols of the many nations whom Sennacherib had overrun. Nor did he trust only in the force of his own supplications, earnest as they were; but remembering that there was then, as in times past, a prophet in Israel, among the remnant that were left, he sent a message to Isaiah, entreating him to strive with him in prayer for them. By the mouth of that prophet, God speedily gave him an answer of comfort, a promise of deliverance and of continuance to the people of his choice: nor was he slack concerning its fulfilment; that very night the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand. How they died we know not; but their destruction, as well it might, struck the survivors with terror and

astonishment, and the land of Israel was speedily cleared of the diminished armies of its enemy. Thus was the promise of deliverance amply made good: that of continuance, in its very nature, could only be verified by a long lapse of time: but in the mean while, for the more abundant confirmation of their faith, God was pleased to afford his people a sign, which, while it ministered to their present need, was in some sort an image of their future condition. "The remnant," he had said, "of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward;"\* and this renewed state of prosperity would be signified to them by what was actually at that time to take place in the land. The Assyrians, during their stay within its borders, had, after the too common custom of invaders, wantonly laid it waste: and, as the following year was that seventh or sabbatical year, in which the Israelites were forbidden by their law to sow or reap, they were in danger of suffering on that account the extremity of famine. But God, who never forsakes his people in the hour of their distress, was mercifully pleased to promise them deliverance from this evil also. He gave them an assurance, that, although the corn which they had sown was trodden down or consumed by the Assyrian army, a spontaneous crop should nevertheless spring up, sufficient not only for the supply of their present wants, but for seed also, which might produce abundant sustenance for them, during the sabbath of the ensuing year. "Ye shall eat this year," he said, "such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof."† But although this return of plenty was promised to the land, it

\* 2 Kings xix. 30.

† Ver. 29.

seemed as though their pious king would not be permitted to live long enough to see it. "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death : " yea, even the prophet Isaiah came to him with a message from the Lord, saying, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live."\*

An ordinary faith might have remained contented with this assurance, and confined itself to a patient submission to the will of Heaven, and a humble preparation for the close of life. But Hezekiah had enjoyed the benefit of a more intimate communion with his God ; he had experienced in what desperate circumstances the fervent prayer of a righteous man is effectual and availeth : he knew that the threatenings of the Merciful were always conditional ; that in the death of him that dieth he hath no pleasure ; and therefore, with many tears and supplications, he prayed, and not in vain, for life. Before Isaiah, who had departed, had passed through the court of the palace, he was sent back again to Hezekiah to tell him that his petition was granted ; that low as he was then brought upon the bed of sickness, in three days he should again be in attendance in the house of the Lord : and as a further sign that this should come to pass, the shadow upon the sun-dial of Ahaz was sent back at his request no less than ten degrees. The day and night, the shadow and the sunshine, the works and movements (as they are called) of nature, are all under the superintending government of the great "Father of lights,"† from whom "every good gift and every perfect gift" proceedeth, who smiteth with sickness, and who healeth, who "bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up,"‡ and with whom, in the secret counsels of his eternal wisdom, however otherwise it may appear to man,

\* 2 Kings xx. 1.

† James i. 17.

‡ 1 Sam. ii. 6.



"there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." The sickness of Hezekiah, and his miraculous recovery, perhaps also the remarkable sign which attended it, became known in other lands; and the king of Babylon, a city which until now appears to have had no communication with the Israelites, sent ambassadors to congratulate him on the event. We have already seen Hezekiah under circumstances of difficulty, and distress, and danger; and have been enabled to judge of his character as of a religious and faithful and right-minded man, though not without some unavoidable alloy of human infirmity and failing. We have now to see him tried by prosperity; and in that contempt of the world which God's true servants, however prosperous, should entertain, we shall find him wanting. He had much to excuse him; the buoyancy of restored health, of triumph over his enemies, the court paid him by the king of Babylon, all strongly tended to lift up his heart, and to make him glory in his riches and his might; to indulge in the pride of life, to feast his eyes, and the eyes of those who came to visit him, on the magnitude and beauty of the things in his possession. But, though it might escape his own observation, that he was doing wrong in thus making a display of his treasures to the stranger, it did not escape the scrutiny of God, who sent him accordingly the rebuke which he needed, by the mouth of Isaiah. To that very Babylon from which the men came who had betrayed him to this exhibition of vain glory, should all his treasures, his people, the inheritors of his royal throne, be carried away in sad captivity: through his inordinate love for them he had transgressed, and through his knowledge of their fate he was most fitly punished. The punishment he felt to be due, and bore it with resignation, expressing his gratitude for its delay till his own eyes were closed in

death, and looking forward with tranquil satisfaction to the interval which still remained during which peace and truth would flourish in his kingdom. Fifteen years he knew were still his allotted portion on the earth, and during those it was thenceforth his resolution to walk humbly with his God. He was perhaps the only mere man to whom it ever was revealed particularly how long he had to live; the Lord, doubtless, had wise reasons for so informing him, and we may rest assured that he has reasons as wise for not so informing us: it is an uncertainty which, while it keeps us always hopeful, never releases us from a godly fear; which animates us to lawful enterprise, and hinders us from sinking into needless despondency; which teaches us to be always ready, and to watch like faithful servants for the coming of our Lord. For "blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."\*

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## CHAP. XXXV.

## DECLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

**H**EZEKIAH having been committed to his grave with singular honour, as one of the best princes who had ever reigned in Jerusalem, the people of Judah, no doubt, expected to find in his son Manasseh a worthy successor of so exemplary a father. Their expectations, however, were grievously disappointed; the young prince displayed, in all points, the most opposite disposition to that of his father, taking a perverse delight in undoing all that he had wisely done, and in practising all that he had dis-

\* Matt. xxiv. 46.

countenanced and forbidden: the idolatrous abominations which had polluted not only the country and the city, but the very temple of God, were again renewed, and carried to a worse extreme of presumptuous wickedness: "He seduced them," says the holy record, "to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel."\* Among his unrighteous actions it is noted, that "he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other."† No particular instances of this are mentioned in the Bible; but there existed among the Jews an old tradition, that the prophet Isaiah was put to death by him in a most cruel manner, being sawn asunder; and the circumstance is supposed by some to be referred to in that passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where its author, speaking of those who before the coming of Christ into the world had obtained a good report through faith, describes the various persecutions which they suffered: "they were stoned, they were *sawn asunder*, were tempted, were slain with the sword."‡ However this may be, it is certain that some of God's prophets endeavoured, though in vain, by speaking to him in the name of the Lord of Israel, to persuade him to a better course; his heart was hardened, and his ears closed against their zealous admonitions, and he seemed resolutely bent on following no guidance but his own proud will, and treading to the last that beaten way which leads only to destruction. God knew, however, that there was a method by which his heart might be touched, and adopted it out of his great mercy. The method was affliction: the captains of the Assyrians came up against him, seized on his person, and imprisoned him in Babylon: there, in

\* 2 Kings xxi. 9.    † Ver. 16.    ‡ Heb. xi. 37.

the depths of the dungeon, he first saw the folly and wickedness of which he had been guilty in striving against God : there, his vain dreams of greatness and licentiousness fled away, and feelings of remorse and penitence succeeded : there, with a contrite and humble spirit, he betook himself to the sure refuge of earnest supplication, and God was entreated of him in his distress, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. We, likewise, are oftentimes induced to mourn over this world's calamities, befalling either ourselves or others ; the feeling is implanted by God himself in our nature, and we cannot suppress it if we would : but we may learn to contain it within proper bounds, and to look upon the incidents which we call misfortunes, not as an overwhelming mass of unmixed evil, but calculated often, as in the case before us, to be the cause of great and far exceeding good, to bring about the triumph of righteousness, and to save endangered souls. If God chastises thus even his worst enemies to their profit, how much more ought those who love him to rejoice, when they feel themselves under the rod of his fatherly correction ! Manasseh, from that time forward, lived an altered life ; he put away the idols, and repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, from him most justly due, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.

In those writings, which though admitted into our Bibles, are called Apocryphal, as not having been adjudged by the Jewish church to form part of the canonical Scriptures, we find one entitled the Prayer of Manasses, king of Judah, when he was holden captive in Babylon : it is piously expressed, and may be read with profit, but has no pretensions to be considered as the composition of that Jewish king, being probably the production of a much later age.

Amon, his son, who succeeded upon his decease, chose to resemble him in his crimes rather than in his repentance ; he began to introduce afresh all the vile practices which had been so lately laid aside ; and, after a short reign of two years, was cut off by a conspiracy amongst his own servants, and was succeeded on the throne by his son Josiah, then only eight years of age. Had Josiah been the child of a righteous father, to have lost him thus early would have been a great misfortune : as it was, it proved a manifest advantage. The young king, left to the unbiassed dictates of his own mind, or fortunate in his instructors, soon showed decided marks of a disposition to seek not after the vain idols of Amon, but after the God of David, the father of his royal house : nor was it long before he entered zealously upon the work of reformation, not only in Jerusalem and Judah, but in those portions also of the former kingdom of Israel to which his authority extended. Throughout these he made a solemn progress, restoring everywhere the worship of God, and defiling the idolatrous altars, by burning upon them dead men's bones, especially those of their priests. While engaged in this undertaking, he came to Bethel, where, three hundred and sixty years before, in the reign of Jeroboam, he had been prophesied of by name, as a king who should arise out of the house of Judah, and do this very thing. The saying of the man of God, who threatened this special defilement of the altar in Bethel, was now fulfilled, and so were also the expectations of that old prophet who had beguiled him to his destruction, but who, confiding in his sanctity, desired his own bones to be laid by his, that they might obtain protection in the grave. For when Josiah heard the story of that transaction, and what the man of God had prophesied concerning him, he said, " Let him alone, let no man move his



bones. So they let his bones alone, and the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria."\* It is not quite certain whether it was before this journey of king Josiah, or after it, that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord the book of the law of Moses, and sent it to the king. Josiah read it, and contrasting its commandments with the actual condition of his people, became exceedingly alarmed: he rent his clothes, and commissioned Hilkiah, the high-priest, with certain other chief men, to inquire of the Lord, by means of Huldah the prophetess, who then dwelt at Jerusalem. The message which she returned to him that sent them foretold in plain terms, the approaching vengeance of the Lord upon his disobedient people; and contained also a comfortable assurance to Josiah, in consideration of his tenderness of heart and sincere humiliation, that his eyes should not see the evils which God would bring upon Jerusalem, but that he should go to his grave in peace. It would appear to argue a sad declension indeed of religious information among the Jewish people, that a complete copy of the law of Moses should be looked upon both by the high-priest and the king as a rarity and a wonder; that the word of truth, which is now the companion and instructor of millions, and to be found in the very humblest homes, should seem to have taken refuge as it were in some obscure corner of the temple. But that our privileges in this respect may avail us, we must turn them to their proper use: the possession of the book will do us no good, unless we read it or hear it read; the hearing and reading it will do us no good, unless we think upon its contents, and pray that we may understand its meaning, and believe what it intends us to believe, and practise what it teaches

\* 2 Kings xxiii. 18.

us to practise. We must not, however, suppose that the Jews of that time were in such a state of absolute ignorance of things divine, as the incident above mentioned seems to imply; the succession of their prophets was still continued among them, of men inspired by God, whose duty it was to warn them of the evil of their doings, to show them the punishment which hung over their heads, and the way to escape it, by turning in penitence to the Lord their God. Besides Huldah, already mentioned, we know of four who prophesied about this time, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah. Nahum foretold the approaching overthrow of the great Assyrian empire, which had so long vexed the Jews; an overthrow indeed leading only to the establishment of another, which would vex them yet more, namely, that of the Chaldees, or of Babylon, but which for the time was a relief from their immediate enemy. The prophet accordingly exhorted Judah,\* as enjoying an interval of peace, to keep its solemn feasts and to perform its vows. Nor was his admonition thrown away upon the good Josiah: he studied in the book of God the manner of celebrating that most famous of the festivals therein enjoined, namely, the Passover, and kept it at Jerusalem with a degree of solemnity such as had not been observed in Israel, though Hezekiah had done well in that respect, since the days of Samuel. Still, though knowledge was increased, and God's worship more attended to than formerly, and the eyes of those who loved him were no longer offended by the open abominations of idolatry, the mournful voice of Jeremiah was heard, proclaiming the backslidings of treacherous Judah, and publishing affliction against Jerusalem.

A fair show is often made upon the outward

\* Nahum i. 15



surface, while below there lies a depth of ravening and wickedness, known in its full enormity only to God, and to those whom he enables to behold it. Not that it ever remains hidden long—depravity becomes after a while too strong for the restraints of hypocrisy, and men commit their sins without being at all ashamed, neither do they blush.\* Out of the heart of such—if suffered to be cherished there—will shortly proceed murders, thefts, adulteries, false witness, blasphemies; the commands of God will one after another be broken and despised, and the evil which cometh upon them, will manifestly be a most deserved and most just judgment, even the very “fruit of their thoughts.”† So long as Josiah lived, this judgment tarried: the good king preserved for a time the disobedient people; but when he was gathered to his fathers, and those who succeeded him in the place of authority became as bad as they; when in the language of Zephaniah, the princes of Zion within her were roaring lions, and her judges were evening wolves;‡ when one and all rejected the lessons of experience, and would not be warned by the fate of those who perished round about them; then did the Lord Jehovah perform his long determined vengeance, and arose to the prey. Josiah's death was brought about in the thirty-ninth year of his age by an act of rashness: the kings of Egypt and Assyria were at war, and Josiah, knowing perhaps the weakness of the latter, and actuated by the honourable motive of affording him protection, went forth to meet and withstand his Egyptian enemy. The king of Egypt gave him fair warning that he had no quarrel with Judah, and sought only to pass by against Assyria; but Josiah persevered, and being wounded in the battle which accordingly took place, returned to Jerusalem, and there breathed his last, being

\* Jer. vi. 15.

† Ver. 19.

‡ Zeph. iii. 3, 7, 8.



lamented by all his people, and specially by the prophet Jeremiah. Lost as they were to shame, and given over to wickedness, they retained some sense, it appears, of what was good, and admired in others the qualities which they neglected in themselves :—a too common case, among those who have never applied themselves in earnest to religion, who have never considered, that to be good for any thing, it must be strictly personal—must influence what they think and do themselves every day of their lives. No man sits contented with his own poverty and sickness, because other people are rich and in good health ; but many a one is satisfied with being one of a christian community, though he himself is destitute of christian knowledge, and christian feelings, with living among religious persons, without being religious. They resemble in this the Jews, who were wont to think themselves in safety, because they were Abraham's children, the absurdity of which opinion Christ made known to them when he said, "if ye were Abraham's children, ye would do Abraham's works :"\* for having a good example to look to, and being in possession of great advantages, if we neglect to follow the one and use the other, can only increase our condemnation. Upon the death of Josiah, the people took one of his sons, named Jehoahaz, or Shallum, and made him king. This proceeding displeased the king of Egypt, who deposed him after he had reigned wickedly for the space of three months, and sent him prisoner into Egypt, from whence, as Jeremiah prophesied,† he never returned, nor saw his native country. Pharaoh Necho substituted in his room another of Josiah's sons, and changed his name from Eliakim to Jehoia-kim : his nature, however, remained unchanged by the alteration either of his name or condition : he did

\* John viii. 39.

† Jer. xxii. 10—12.

evil in the sight of the Lord, and persecuted, with bitter hatred, those who presumed to take notice of his offences, or warn him to repent. Thus when Urijah, a prophet of the Lord, had discharged his duty in this respect by openly proclaiming his message from heaven, the king sought to slay him; and when he fled into Egypt, sent men to fetch him thence, and put him to death with un pitying severity. Jeremiah was likewise in great danger, and had he not found some powerful protectors among the princes, would have suffered death, being accused by the priests of having prophesied the destruction of their temple. Jehoiakim, the nominee and tributary of Pharaoh, was now destined to change his master. The conqueror of Nineveh and the Assyrian empire, the great and victorious Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, having defeated the Egyptian army at Carchemish, came up against Jerusalem: he bound Jehoiakim in fetters, with the intent of carrying him to Babylon, but this it does not appear that he did then, suffering him to remain as his servant, rather than as king of Judea, for three years; after which, upon his rebellion, he sent a host against him, who made him prisoner, and would have led him away captive to Babylon, had he not died when on the point of setting out upon his melancholy journey: and his dead body, in fulfilment of another prophecy of Jeremiah,\* was buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem. To this degrading end are brought the enemies of God, however high may have been their earthly station, when they provoke him by their crimes to make them examples of his vengeance. Happy rather are they, who, being poor perhaps and lowly in condition, are rich in faith, and patiently continuing in that state of life to which their God has called them, or

\* Jer. xxvi. 19.

labouring honestly to better it by worthy means, go down at last into their decent and peaceful graves, regretted by those who knew them, and rest in hope of a joyful resurrection to glory hereafter, through Jesus Christ their Lord.

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## CHAP. XXXVI.

### THE CAPTIVITY AT BABYLON.

**WE** have now arrived at that important period in the history of the Hebrew nation, commonly known by the name of the Babylonish captivity, or, as it is styled in the genealogy of our Lord, according to St. Matthew,\* the carrying away to Babylon. We are not, however, to suppose that this took place all at once; it was a work of time, and effected at various intervals, by successive removals of the people; so that while a part of them, and that, indeed, the principal and most useful part, were captives in the land of the Chaldeans, a part remained for some time under their ordinary kingly government, in the condition, however, of tributaries, in their own country. At the time of Jehoiakim's death, already spoken of, Nebuchadnezzar took back with him to Babylon a certain portion of the spoils of Jerusalem, and some children of royal or noble birth, recommended either for personal beauty, or quickness of understanding, to be servants in his palace. They were well treated, being nourished with a daily portion of the king's provision; four of them, however, Daniel and his three companions, best known by their Chaldean

\* Matt. i. 11.

names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were unwilling to break the law of their God, by partaking of these heathenish dainties, and throve so much the more upon the simple diet of pulse and water, which they prevailed upon him who had the charge over them to allow in their stead. After three years thus passed in attention to their duty, they were brought before the king, and pleased him so much by the progress they had made in learning, that he promoted them to honour, and caused them to be ranked among the wise men of Babylon : while Daniel continued to be held in high repute among his countrymen, and what is far better than any praise of men, enjoyed the favour of his God, being ranked by him with Noah and Job, among the excellent of the earth.\* In the mean time, Jechoniah, son of Jehoiakim, was allowed by Nebuchadnezzar to occupy the throne of Judah ; but for the space of three months only ; at the end of which he also was carried to Babylon, and with him most of the chief men of the country ; among whom was Ezekiel the prophet, and Mordecai, of whom mention is made in the book of Esther, or perhaps one of his ancestors, attended by a number of the best handicraftsmen of their various trades ; so that Zedekiah, who succeeded to the kingdom, reigned for the most part over the poorest only, and those whom it was not thought worth while to take away. Exceptions to this there undoubtedly were ; and among these one of the most eminent was the prophet Jeremiah, who remained at Jerusalem, and offered from time to time such counsels and warnings to its king, as, if they had been listened to, would have deferred, if not altogether prevented, his approaching doom. His advice was, that he should continue to serve the king of Babylon with fidelity ;

\* Ezek. xiv. 14.

and not give ear to the lying prophets, who endeavoured to persuade him that those who had been led away captive would be restored again in a few years, and all things return to their former state of prosperity and independence. Nor were these deceitful expectations held out to the dwellers in Judea only; the captives in Babylonia had their false prophets also, who talked to them in the same manner; upon these Ezekiel, in his prophecy, denounced the severest judgments: and Jeremiah, feeling it his duty, as God's messenger to the whole nation, to instruct them also in the truth, sent them a letter, exhorting them to remain patiently as they were, and to seek the peace of the city where they were kept as captives, for the full space of seventy years, which God had appointed as the duration of the captivity. These prophets were as wicked in their actions as they were presumptuous and false in their words: two of them were burnt alive by Nebuchadnezzar,\* for grievous crimes which they committed in Babylon, and another, Hananiah, was stricken by God with sudden death, for his rebellious conduct.

The prophecies of Jeremiah, at this time, were not limited to the ruin of his own country; he foresaw, also, the destruction of haughty Babylon, which had brought Zion under the yoke of bondage; and when king Zedekiah went there on a visit, attended by one of his princes, Seraiah by name, Jeremiah wrote his prophecy in a book, requesting Seraiah to read it there, and afterwards to cast the book into the river Euphrates, and to say, "Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her."† It was this feeling, shared by others, who also had the prophetic spirit upon them, which prompted them,

\* Jer. xxix. 22. xxviii. 17.

† Ibid. li. 64.

when they had hung their harps upon the willows of Babylon, and refused to sing the Lord's song to their conquerors for very grief, to exclaim, in anticipation of her certain downfall, "O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us!"\* The man who should do this, Cyrus the Persian, was at that time an infant in his cradle; but Isaiah, more than an hundred years before, had pointed out his country and his name,—had said that he should do God's pleasure upon Babylon, and that his arm should be on the Chaldeans.† They had now from Jeremiah the additional assurance that these events would take place at the end of seventy years from the commencement of their captivity;‡ and therefore if they believed God speaking by his prophets, the awful destruction of their city and temple now about to take place, though it must cause in them the bitterest sorrow, would not disturb, but rather strengthen the more, the foundations of their faith. If God made good his threatenings of punishment, they felt sure that he would make good his promises of restoration: they felt sure, that, at his own appointed time, his own appointed agent would appear, and say to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundations shall be laid.§ Zedekiah, having broken his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, and formed an alliance with Egypt, brought down upon him the vengeance of the Babylonian king; Jerusalem was straitly besieged, and Zedekiah, though he asked Jeremiah to pray for him, placed his main trust in the help which he expected that the Egyptians would afford him. While they were at a distance, he had promised liberty to the bondmen in the city,

\* Psalm cxxxvii. 8.

† Jer. xxix. 10.

‡ Isaiah xlviii. 14.

§ Isaiah xli. 26.

as the law of Moses commanded to be done every seventh year ; but when he heard that the Egyptians were coming, he revoked his promise, and kept them still in slavery. Jeremiah also, who ventured to rebuke him for his misdeeds, he committed to a noisome dungeon ; where, had it not been for the generous friendship of Ebed Melech, the Ethiopian, God's prophet would miserably have perished. To this incident he alludes in his book of Lamentations : " I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice : hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee ; thou saidst, Fear not."\* And what God said to him, he says to all his servants, who place their whole trust and dependence upon him in all the trying circumstances of this changeful life ; to all who, regardless of the consequences, steadily do their duty ; to all who believe that there is no condition so low, so dangerous, or so afflictive, as that He cannot bring them out of it, if He will, with honour, security, and joy. Jeremiah, being delivered out of the horrible pit, into which he had, apparently, been thrown to die, was again brought before the king, and again counselled him to submit to the Chaldeans ; who now, having beaten back the Egyptian army, had a second time besieged Jerusalem. Zedekiah, willing in his heart to take the prophet's advice, but fearing, if he did so, the indignation of his princes, procrastinated till it was too late : a breach was made in the walls, and the enemy entered. Intercepted in his flight, he was brought before Nebuchadnezzar, his eyes cruelly put out, and he himself bound in chains, and carried to Babylon ; fulfilling thus the prophecy of Ezekiel, that he should not see it though he should die there.† The holy city, and

\* Lam. iii. 55—57.

† Ezek. xii. 13.

the temple of God, the celebrated work of Solomon, were burnt to the ground; and the grief of Judah vented itself in the mournful accents of the seventy-ninth psalm: "O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled, and made Jerusalem a heap of stones; we are become a reproach to our neighbours,—a scorn and derision to them that are round about us."

But although God thought fit, for their manifold offences, to punish his people, they were his people still; and this the neighbouring nations were made to feel who had insulted them in their calamity. His prophet was commanded to foretel a speedy vengeance upon Edom, upon Moab and Ammon, upon the Philistines, and upon Tyre, for their unfeeling conduct: and this vengeance was inflicted by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, who, after his conquest of Judea, proceeded to reduce these nations also under his powerful yoke. The city which resisted him the longest was Tyre, whose great wealth, arising from commercial undertakings, had invested it with proportionable power. It was then what our own country is now, the mistress of the sea, "the crowning city, whose merchants were princes, whose traffickers were the honourable of the earth."\* But she sinned through pride, and her glory departed, and her captivity lasted as long as that of Israel, and she became by degrees a ruin and a desolation, a mere void place to spread fishers' nets upon, like the top of a rock.† Yet thus much Christ said for her, that had the mighty works which he did amongst his countrymen been done in her, she would have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.‡ May we, the inhabitants of favoured England, who exceed her as

\* Isaiah xxiii. 8.

† Ezek. xxvi. 4, 14.

‡ Matt. xi. 21; Luke x. 13.



much in spiritual privileges as in extent of commerce and of empire, be warned by her example, and escape her fall. The siege of Tyre lasted thirteen years; during this time, Nebuchadnezzar, being unable to administer in person the affairs of Judea, had placed the remnant of the people left there under the government of Gedaliah. This ruler, after a while, was treacherously murdered by Ishmael, who being of the royal blood, thought perhaps to have recovered the kingdom for himself; but, finding no support, fled to the Ammonites, and left the people in a state of alarm and perplexity as to what course they should adopt. What they did shows strongly their weak and wayward character: they consulted Jeremiah, who still dwelt among them, whether they should seek refuge in Egypt from the vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar. He told them decidedly that they should not, promising them protection from God himself against the king of Babylon; but no sooner had they heard his answer than they determined upon going, a determination which they straightway executed, departing in a body into Egypt, where they returned again to their old idolatries, and defied all the warnings of the prophet. When Nebuchadnezzar had taken Tyre after a tedious siege, the Lord promised to reward him for his labours with the spoils of Egypt, which had offended God by its perfidious conduct towards his people;\* and thither accordingly he next betook himself, involving the whole of that rich land in a fearful desolation, of which the Jews, who had gone thither, as they fancied, to a sure refuge, of necessity partook. Victorious now over all whom he had attacked, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon, and there being instructed by Daniel in the particulars of a

\* Ezek. xxix. 6, 18, 19.

dream which he dreamt, and wherein none of his wise men were able to assist him, he raised him and his three friends to greater honour than before, and probably entrusted to him some important commission. At least, we may be sure that it was during Daniel's absence from Babylon that the king set up the golden image, which, of all the chief men, three only, namely, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refused to worship. The dreadful sentence of being cast alive for their refusal into a burning fiery furnace, they submitted to with a noble resignation, feeling that they were in the hands, not of the proud man who condemned them to it, but of the merciful God who could deliver them out of it, if he so thought good. "Through faith," as says the apostle to the Hebrews, "they quenched the violence of fire:"\* it had no power at all on them to harm them; their very dress remained uninjured, not an hair of their heads was singed. Are not these instances of mighty force to make us trust in God? It is true he does not such miracles for his servants in our days; but he has given us sufficient reason to be sure that the conduct of which he testified his approval then, is that of which at all times he approveth. The less immediate our reward is, the more are our faith and patience exercised, and the more they are exercised the more our souls are purified and weaned from earthly vanities, and brought nearer to him. Nebuchadnezzar at first was astonished at the miracle, and gave glory to the God of these righteous men; but his own pomp and greatness had made too deep an impression on his mind, and as he walked in his palace and looked around upon Babylon, his whole soul became centered in himself, and he boasted of his possessions as if he was their creator,

\* Heb. xi. 34.

and owed them to no power superior to his own. Therefore God suddenly took from him his reason, and in this degraded state he remained for seven years, acquiring the tastes and habits of a brute animal, at the end whereof it pleased the Lord to restore him to his senses, and to afford him a knowledge of what he had undergone, and why he had undergone it, that he might thenceforth praise and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth and his ways judgment, and might own that those who walk in pride he is able to abase.\* After his death, the only action recorded of his son and successor, Evil-Merodach, is his kind treatment of the captive king of Judah, Jeconiah, whom he took out of the prison where he had long languished, and restored to a state of comfort and honour, though retaining him at Babylon for the rest of his days. Belshazzar, however, the next king, was of a dissolute and profane character, as he showed on the very last night of his reign, when, his city being now besieged by Cyrus the Persian, though well knowing what great things God had done to his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, he dared to provoke him, by using the sacred vessels taken out of the temple at Jerusalem, in his riotous and idolatrous feast. In the midst of it, an hand appeared, and wrote on the wall of his palace words which Daniel alone could explain to him, signifying that God had numbered and finished his kingdom; that he was weighed in the balance and found wanting; that his kingdom was divided and given to the Medes and Persians.† This assurance from God received an immediate fulfilment; that very night the Persian army, having turned the waters of the river into a reservoir, which they had secretly dug for the pur-

\* Dan. iv. 37.

† Dan. v. 25—28.

pose (and that they would act thus had been foretold by Isaiah,)\* entered the city by the channel so laid dry, and obtained possession of it, slaying its king. Although Cyrus was in truth the chief director of this enterprise, he suffered his aged uncle, Darius, the Median, to enjoy the fruits of it during the remainder of his life; and it was during his government that Daniel's faith and constancy was put to trial by a decree which was issued, placing the king in the stead of God, forbidding prayers to be offered to any but him. When Daniel, who continued his public devotions as usual, was brought up for judgment, the king, who valued him, perceived his error, and strove in vain to remedy it: "the law of the Medes and Persians," Daniel's enemies said, "must not be broken," and consequently that pious servant of the Lord was cast into a den filled with fierce lions, and the king passed a night of grief and anguish, hoping, yet not venturing to believe, that his God would preserve him. But faith, that great wonder-working power, the faith of Daniel, prevailed to stop the mouths of the hungry lions.† When Darius went in the morning to the cave, he found Daniel alive and unhurt; and, filled with indignation at his accusers, cast them into it, whom the lions tore in pieces in a moment. The adversary of our souls, "like a roaring lion, seeketh whom he may devour:"‡ against those who "resist him, steadfast in the faith," he can do nothing; it is those only who through wickedness are like himself, whom he gets into his deadly power, and destroys for ever.

\* Isaiah xlv. 27.

† Heb. xi. 33.

‡ 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

## CHAP. XXXVII.

## THE RESTORATION.

THE seventy years of captivity, announced in the prophecies of Jeremiah, being at length completed, God made good his promise of restoration to the afflicted remnant of his people, by putting it into the heart of Cyrus, who was now the undisputed sovereign of all western Asia, to send them back to their own land, with permission and encouragement to rebuild their city and temple. Daniel was now become a very aged man, and probably did not long survive his miraculous deliverance from the den of lions. The fame, however, of that wonderful event must no doubt have reached the ears of Cyrus, and have induced him to treat Daniel with the same consideration as had his uncle Darius the Mede, and the kings of Babylon before him. Daniel, therefore, would have ample opportunity of explaining to Cyrus the part, which, long ago, by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, the God of Israel had allotted him, in bringing about the restoration of his people : and, showing him also that the term of their seventy years' captivity was now expired, would lead him to signalize the first year of his reign by this act of sound policy, as well as of compassion. For it is not in reigning over lands laid waste, and cities ruined, not in trampling under foot a debased multitude of trembling slaves, that the true glory of kings is shown ; but rather in building again the old waste places, in raising up the foundations of many generations, in being called " the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in,"\* and especially in enabling their subjects

\* Isaiah lviii. 12.

to worship God with all convenient decency and peace, that their royal functions are most worthily discharged, and their names receive the most abundant blessing. Herein we see as it were an earnest of those many glorious prophecies, which assured to the Church of God in after ages the support and ministration of the Gentiles; prophecies, which are now fulfilled in part, and after a spiritual manner, and which shall receive, when the end draweth nigh, their entire and literal completion. When Cyrus dismissed such of the Jews as were willing to return to their own country, he did not suffer them to depart in a state of destitution, but bestowed upon them, besides other marks of his royal favour, that which they doubtless valued more than all, the collection of sacred vessels and utensils of their former temple, which, after its destruction, had been preserved in Babylon: fulfilling in this instance also, a prophecy of Jeremiah, who had said that there those vessels should be until the day that the Lord would visit them: then would He bring them up, and restore them to their place.\*

It appears that many of the Jews, being now kindly treated by Cyrus, felt no inclination to return to their own land, and endure the difficulties and hardships which its desolate condition led them to fear they might encounter; so that the number of those who went back, under the command of Zerubbabel, did not greatly exceed forty-two thousand persons, chiefly of Judah, Benjamin and Levi, though not perhaps without a mixture of the other tribes. Zerubbabel, the son of Salathiel, and grandson of Jechonias, whose long imprisonment at Babylon and subsequent release has been already mentioned, though not allowed to take the title of king, appears to have

\* Jer. xxvii. 22.

been the representative of David's royal house, by both the lines descending from his sons Nathan and Solomon, and is therefore mentioned in both the genealogies of our Saviour Christ. He was, in consequence, the natural leader and commander of the people in their homeward expedition, and being ably seconded by the high-priest, Joshua, the son of Josedech, took active measures, when he arrived in Judea, to prepare for the needful restorations at Jerusalem. When all was ready, they laid with solemn ceremony the foundations of the house of the Lord; and while the younger and more sanguine portion of the people, rejoicing at the beginning of so good a work, shouted for gladness, those who had seen the former temple, and knew how little probability there was, with their diminished means, that this could ever equal it in splendour, lamented aloud; so that it was hard to "discern the noise of the shout of joy, from the noise of the weeping of the people."\* And indeed, so far as mere outward beauty was concerned, their fears were realized: the prophet Haggai, after the house was built, said to its builders, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? And yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."† The privilege peculiar to the second temple, which so much raised it in dignity above the first, was the personal presence of our

\* Ezra iii. 13.

† Haggai ii. 3—7.

Saviour Christ : “ the desire of all nations,” the great Deliverer ; whose coming was expected, though without a clear knowledge of his character, by both Jew and Gentile ; whom, now that he is known, his faithful people seek daily, where he reigns in heaven, with the never satisfied desire of humbly adoring love ; to whom hereafter, when he appears in glory, all nations of the world shall flock together, every tongue shall confess, and every knee shall bow.\* This Lord, as said also the prophet Malachi, “ came suddenly to his temple,”† first as an infant, then as a child, lastly as a full-grown and perfect man, a teacher of heavenly wisdom, he appeared within its courts. When at Jerusalem he was daily there ; the zeal of God’s house did even eat him up ;‡ he claimed for it, and enforced with pious indignation, the respect due to its awful holiness, and would not suffer that to be made a house of merchandise, far less of thievery and cheating, which God had hallowed to himself. Apply this, my christian readers, to the temple of your hearts ; observe that God who has promised to dwell there looketh not on the outward appearance, chooseth not the most comely in the eyes of man, but requireth that the place of his habitation should be clean and pure within. Think not that you are less fitted for the indwelling of your Lord, because you are poor, or deformed, or maimed, or in any other way devoid of personal grace or beauty, but tremble lest you be found unfit for it, because you are worldly minded, hardened in heart, obstinate, selfish, given to serve divers lusts and appetites, envying, or belying, or beguiling, or hating one another. Pray him to make you fit, by destroying in you, through his gracious power, all such evil habits, ungodly thoughts, and wicked practices ; pray

\* Rom. xiv. 11.

† Mal. iii. 1.

‡ John ii. 17.



him to purify you, if it seem good, even in the furnace of affliction; take all that he does to you, however it may sting and wound your hearts, and thwart your yet undisciplined tempers, as the correction of a tender father, as matter for sure rejoicing in the end, as working in you repentance not to be repented of, and the things which accompany salvation.

But it is time to return to the history of the Jewish people, whom we left commencing the good work of building up their temple, with a degree of zeal which promised that it would speedily be brought to a conclusion. An unforeseen hindrance, however, arose, in the conduct of their neighbours,—the inhabitants of that part of the country which, after the captivity of the ten tribes, had been re-peopled by the subjects of the Assyrian king. These men, as I have before noticed, possessed a sort of imperfect worship of the true God, in conjunction with their own idols; and, hearing of the work in which the Jews were engaged, they made them offers of assistance, intending to worship in common with them in the temple about to be erected. This, however, Zerubbabel and the other rulers of the Jews refused, disclaiming all connexion with men of such loose principles with regard to a main article of religion, as they had shown themselves to be, and consequently brought upon themselves the hatred of that people, who thenceforth devoted their efforts, and not without effect, to hindering, by every means in their power, the progress of the work. Their influence, thus exerted, was sufficient to prevent it from going on during a period of fourteen years, to the second year of Darius, king of Persia: at which time the Jews, being sharply reproved by Haggai for their indolence, bestirred themselves vigorously again, and at length succeeded, in spite of all opposition, in finishing the building, Darius having caused search

to be made in the records of his kingdom, and having found the decree of the great Cyrus, which authorized and enjoined it. It was not, however, the encouragement of earthly rulers only, which enabled them to go on: the promises and assurances of Him whose house they were building were largely vouchsafed to them, as their most certain stay. "Not by might nor by power," said the Lord of hosts to Zerubbabel by his prophet Zechariah, "but by my Spirit,"\* would the undertaking be completed: "the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of the house; his hands shall also finish it, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you." Animated by these, and similar expressions, to be found in the writings of the prophets, they dedicated with joy to their great Protector the finished building; and soon afterwards experienced another proof of his care for their well-being, in the arrival of Ezra, the priest, from Persia, bringing with him more than a thousand of their countrymen, and furnished with authority from the king to lay out considerable sums of money upon the necessary expenses of the house of God, and to rule the people according to his law. For this latter service he was eminently qualified: he was one of those priests who knew that their "lips should keep knowledge, and that the people should seek the law at their mouth, because they were the messengers of the Lord of hosts:"† and therefore he had taken care to make himself, through God's grace, "a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord had given; he had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments:"‡ to instruct those who knew them not, and to compel those who did know, to observe them, by the exercise

\* Zech. iv. 6, 9. † Mal. ii. 7. ‡ Ezra, vii. 6, 10.

of that lawful authority committed to him by God and the king. He travelled to Judea, without any soldiers to guard him and his companions, though they carried with them much silver and gold, and the robbers, as well as enemies, who infested the country through which they had to travel, rendered such a journey dangerous. The only weapons which he used for his protection were prayers and fastings; and these God graciously admitted to prevail. He arrived safely at Jerusalem, and paid over the monies which he brought with him into the hands of the officers, who were appointed to apply it to every needful purpose: and this done, he betook himself in the next place, to bring about a reformation, no less needful, in the manners of the people. For they, regardless of the fall of Solomon, which had been caused by his connexion with strange women, and of the many evils which throughout their history were seen to have arisen from a similar cause, as well as the direct prohibition of the law of Moses, had intermarried to a very great degree with the daughters of the heathen—their principal men, far from putting a stop to this, having been chief in the trespass. The righteous spirit of Ezra was sorely grieved at this—he humbled himself before God, weeping and lying prostrate before his holy house, and did not cease, till by such conduct he had awakened a similar feeling of remorse and sorrow in the bosoms of the transgressors. They came before him from all quarters, oppressed with a sense of guilt, and listened with attention and obedience to his commandments, to put away these foreign wives, who would soon otherwise have seduced them to idolatry, and to walk thenceforward more strictly, and therefore more securely, according to the law of God. Happy are they, who, when the sins which they cherish are made manifest to their conscience by some faithful messenger of the

Lord of hosts, have thereupon the courage and resolution to renounce them,—to strike off spiritually the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, which has offended; to forego without a murmur those sources of worldly comfort, from which spring hindrances to their christian course; to count as loss what others count as gain, that they may win Christ, and sharing in his fellowship of suffering now, may be partakers of his glory.

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## CHAP. XXXVIII.

## HISTORY OF ESTHER AND NEHEMIAH.

WHILE Ezra, the priest, was engaged at Jerusalem, in reforming the manners of his countrymen, and especially in engaging them to put away the foreign women whom they had married in contravention of the law of Moses, an event which seems an exception to the rule that he was labouring to enforce, occurred in Persia, and, as far as we can judge from the beneficial consequences to which it led, received the approbation of God. Ahasuerus, king of that country, called also Artaxerxes, having divorced his wife Vashti, who had given him offence by refusing to make her public appearance at a banquet which he was giving to his nobles, commanded search to be made for a fit successor to her among the maidens of the land. Among the Jews then living at Shushan, the place of the king's residence, was one named Mordecai, of a family which had many years before been brought from Jerusalem, at the time when Jechoniah was made captive, and who had now under his guardianship a damsel named Esther, his uncle's

daughter, This damsel, among others, was taken into the king's palace, and finding favour in his eyes, was made his wife, and crowned by him as queen, instead of Vashti. By Mordecai's desire, she concealed the fact of her Jewish origin, and suffered her former guardian to remain, as heretofore, in attendance at the king's gate, though privately she paid him the utmost reverence, and implicitly followed his advice. Mordecai about this time did service to the king, by revealing a conspiracy formed against him, which he had accidentally overheard : a service which at the time met with no reward, though afterwards it was remembered to his advantage. Let us do our duty, as Christians and citizens, in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call us, without repining, should we apparently gain nothing thereby ; sooner or later we are sure to reap, if we faint not ; our works will follow us ; our reward, whether bestowed on us in this life or not, is surely laid up for us on high ; and setting aside all earthly benefits, the comfort of a good conscience is in itself the most valuable of all, because it is the nearest to that spiritual happiness which we look forward to in heaven.

We have hitherto considered Mordecai simply in the light of a prudent man, and a loyal subject ; an event which now took place, enables us to look upon him as inflexibly firm in following the dictates of his conscience, no matter to what peril it might expose him. The case was this : Haman the Agagite, that is to say, a man descended from the ancient royal family of Amalek, was promoted to a station of dignity in the court, and became, therefore, entitled to the usual tokens of reverence paid to his rank by the officers of the palace, who bowed themselves to the ground as he passed by. But Amalek was a nation, as Mordecai well knew, at special enmity with God : it was one with which the Lord had sworn to have

war from generation to generation ;\* and therefore it is probable he judged that any reverence shown by him to an Amalekite, would be the transgression of a higher commandment than that of the king ; and where his duty to God and his earthly sovereign were at variance, he felt that he had no alternative but to discharge the former. Haman soon perceived that Mordecai treated him with disrespect ; and being not only proud, but revengeful and malicious, he determined to punish not him alone, but the whole Jewish nation, to which he belonged ; and, availing himself of his influence with the king, he persuaded him, by false accusations against the Jews, to sign a decree, giving them up to destruction, on a day to be determined by lot, in all places of his dominion. The lot was cast, and Providence so ordered it, that nearly a whole year was interposed between the decree and its execution ; giving time, thereby, for those events which confounded all the devices of Haman, and turned the evil which he had meditated against God's people upon his own guilty head. The intelligence, in the meanwhile, caused the utmost astonishment and alarm to the whole nation of the Jews ; and Mordecai perceiving himself, however innocently, to be the cause of this calamity, felt himself bound to do his utmost, by every lawful method, to prevent it. To this end he urged upon Queen Esther the necessity of appearing in the presence of Artaxerxes, and begging the lives of her people—a step not unattended with danger to herself, it being the law of Persia, that whosoever intruded upon the king uncalled for, was liable to suffer death. Persuaded, however, by the arguments of Mordecai, that doubtless for this end it was that God had raised up her, a lowly Jewish maiden, to share the greatness of the Persian king,

\* Exod. xvii. 16.

she boldly resolved to risk every thing for the deliverance of her nation. When she appeared in the king's presence, he looked upon her with an eye of favour, and extending towards her his golden sceptre as a token of security, promised to grant whatever request she might have to make. At first she merely asked that the king and Haman would come to the banquet which she had prepared for them, and when they were there, repeated the same request for the ensuing day. Haman went home to his house, proud indeed of the honour which the queen had done him, but still nourishing in his heart an unappeasable thirst of vengeance against Mordecai, which embittered all his enjoyments, and led him, following the advice of his wife and friends, to erect a gallows, on which it was his intention to prevail on the king to suffer him to hang Mordecai the following day. On that night the king could not sleep, and having caused the chronicles of his kingdom to be read to him for his amusement, he found therein written an account of the good service which Mordecai had formerly done, and which had remained unrewarded. When Haman therefore came in the morning, intending to petition for Mordecai's death, the king asked him what should be done unto the man whom he delighted to honour; and he, thinking that that man must be himself, said that he should be dressed in the royal robes, and mounted on the king's horse, should be led through the city in solemn procession by one of the chief nobles. What then must have been his grief and mortification, when he was commanded to go himself and show these marks of reverence to that very Mordecai the Jew, whom he had hoped that day to ruin? He went home, mourning and cast down, feeling that this success of his enemy was the beginning of his own overthrow; and when in the evening he again attended at the royal banquet, he soon

found that his fate was at hand ; for Esther, being desired to prefer her request, made it in terms of bitter accusation against him, for the lives of herself and her people, whom Haman had plotted to destroy. One attempt he made to obtain forgiveness from the queen, which only irritated her husband's anger the more, and being hurried away from the palace, he was speedily hanged on the gallows fifty cubits high, which he had erected for Mordecai. The king would now have willingly revoked the decree, which he had been led to sign, for the massacre of the Jews ; but this, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, could not be done. He sent forth however a new decree, empowering them to use arms in their own defence, which gave them such courage, that, being helped by the governors of the different provinces, who knew that the king favoured them, they every where overcame those who assaulted them, and put them to death : so that the day of their intended destruction became a day which they kept to all succeeding generations as a joyful festival, in memory of their great deliverance. Mordecai was exalted to a high station of trust and authority, second only to the king in his kingdom, and others of his countrymen sharing also in his advancement, Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah, held the honourable office of cup-bearer, and as such ministered to the king at his banquets. One day when he attended in the discharge of his duty, his countenance was sad, and the king asking him the reason, the queen also sitting by him at the table, he ventured to declare it, saying, " Let the king live for ever : why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire ?"\*

\* Neh. ii. 3.



It appears from this statement of the condition of Jerusalem, that they who had made it their first care to rebuild the temple, had been enabled, probably in consequence of their poverty, to effect nothing more as to the public buildings of the city, which, the walls especially, remained in the ruinous state to which they had been reduced by the Chaldeans. Nehemiah was a man enjoying all the advantages and comforts of worldly station, and of his sovereign's favour; but the love of his country, and zeal for God's honour, were cherished in his heart, and he readily renounced them all, for permission to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and to promote the welfare of the children of Israel. His was the best of all public characters, that of a truly devout and religious patriot: firm and uncompromising in the discharge of duty, but acting always under a sense of his own weakness and of the necessity of help from God. In the execution of his purpose, to which he betook himself immediately after his arrival at Jerusalem, he met with many difficulties and discouragements, arising principally from the jealousy and ill will of the Samaritans, and other near neighbours of the Jews, who first treated his intentions with contempt, but finding that he persevered, endeavoured to intimidate him by threats of actual violence; so that the builders of the wall laboured under his orders, holding their working tools in one hand, and their weapon in the other. Not daring openly to assail him, while thus prepared for defence, his enemies sought to entice him to a meeting with them, when they might have laid hands on him with ease; and this failing, they endeavoured to deter him from his purpose, by threats that they would accuse him as a rebel to the king, and to induce him, by spreading rumours of his intended assassination, to shut himself up in the temple, and so leave his work undone. The sagacity and courage of Nehemiah,

strengthened as he was by God, to whom he prayed daily, triumphed over all these artifices, and enabled him to complete the building of the wall: to celebrate which event he called the people together, and having caused Ezra the priest to read to them a portion of the law of Moses, dismissed them to their homes, that they might keep the day as one holy to the Lord, by feasting and gladness, and charitable acts. A short time afterwards he appointed another general assembly, and ordained not a festival, but a day of fasting and humiliation, that they might remember how exceedingly as a nation they had provoked the Lord, and might entreat him for the future to look upon them with an eye of favour, entering on their parts into a solemn engagement to walk thenceforward according to God's law, abstaining from the practices which he had forbidden, and cheerfully contributing out of their worldly substance whatsoever might be needful for his worship and service. Having effected these important improvements in the condition of his countrymen, Nehemiah returned for a while to Persia, but though not absent long, he found that the cessation of his vigilant superintendence, even for a little while, had produced an injurious effect upon the behaviour of that fickle people: various abuses, some of which provoked the indignant rebukes of the prophet Malachi, began to reappear among them; the sabbath was again violated, the altar and ministers of God were defrauded of their accustomed offerings, strange women were taken to wife, and connexions were thus formed, even in the priestly family, with the enemies of Israel.\* All these corruptions Nehemiah on his second visit set himself to

\* Josephus, in his work on Jewish Antiquities, B. xi. ch. 8, relates that Manasses, son of Jaddus the high priest, married the daughter of Sanaballetes the Cuthean, Satrap of Samaria, and having abandoned Jerusalem, became the priest of a new temple

root out, with so much zeal and success, that he was enabled, in all the boldness of an approving conscience, to approach his God in prayer, and to say, "Remember me, O my God, for good concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof."\* This worthy man was the last civil governor appointed in Judea by the Persian kings—the Jews were left to the government of their high-priests, unassisted hereafter by their prophets, who ceased at the death of Malachi, with whose prophecies of the Christ to come, and of his forerunner John the Baptist, the volume of the Old Testament is concluded. The events which occurred in the interval between that and the commencement of the New, as recorded in history, and many of them foretold by Daniel, are of sufficient importance to form the subject of a separate chapter.

which his father-in-law built for him upon mount Gerizim. He connects these events with the reign of the last Darius, and the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great; it is more probable, however, that they took place in the time of Darius the Second, and that this Manasses is the person mentioned in Neh. xiii. 28, as the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. We learn also from him (b. xii. ch. 5,) that when Antiochus Epiphanes persecuted the Jews, they, fearing the like infliction, disclaimed all connexion with them, adopted the heathen rites, and caused their temple to be publicly dedicated to the Hellenic Jupiter. This temple was afterwards destroyed by John Hircanus; and the concurrence of all these causes produced that state of bitter hatred towards each other, in which we find the two nations when Christ came into the world. See Eccles. i. 25, 26.

\* Neh. xiii. 14.

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## CHAP. XXXIX.

## CONCLUSION.

**C**ONCERNING the interval of time which existed between the end of Nehemiah's government in Judea, and the nativity of our Saviour Christ, no information is afforded us in Scripture, excepting in one, and that a most remarkable manner; namely, in prophetic declarations of the principal events which were to take place within that period, and were made known to Daniel during the Jews' captivity at Babylon. That whatever was foretold with relation to these times in the book of Daniel, was most exactly fulfilled, is made known to us, not only by various heathen writers, but also by the Jew Josephus, who wrote his history about the time of the second destruction of Jerusalem; and by the authors of the two books of the Maccabees, who, although not to be ranked among the inspired writers, communicate to us much interesting and important information. For about an hundred years after the death of Nehemiah, the Jews remained subject to the Persian kings; their extensive empire was then suddenly and violently overthrown by the young king of Macedon, Alexander, surnamed the Great, who, having conquered the Persian armies in several battles, subdued their whole country up to the very borders of India; and having then given himself up to luxury and intemperance, died in the flower of his age, a marked instance how frail and perishable all human greatness is, and how much easier it is to conquer nations and kingdoms, than to gain the mastery, without God's grace assisting, over the pride of life, and the temptations of the world and the flesh.

Let us pray constantly for that grace, that we may fight the good fight of faith, and thank God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The mighty acts of Alexander, and the short duration of his power, were foretold in the visions of Daniel. The Macedonian empire is there exhibited under the image of an he-goat, coming from the west, having a notable horn between his eyes, and rushing with fury against a ram with two horns, representing the united kingdoms of Media and Persia, whom he cast down to the ground, and trampled under his feet. The goat, having done this, waxed very great; and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; by which circumstance the death of Alexander is clearly pointed out, as is also the division of his kingdom among four of his princes, by the springing up of four other horns, in the place of that which had been broken. "Four kingdoms," says the explanation of the vision, "shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power."\* Of these four kingdoms, two, being distant from the Jews, exercised little influence upon the condition of that people; but with the other two, namely, Syria on the north, and Egypt on the south, it was strictly connected, being at various times reduced under the dominion of both of them. The first who got possession of Judea, in spite of the resistance of the people, was Ptolemy, king of Egypt, who carried away from Jerusalem an hundred thousand captives, and settled them in Egypt. Those who dwelt there, as they increased in multitude, became by degrees more familiar with the Greek language than with their own, and accordingly for their use the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament were translated into Greek; a translation which, called the Septuagint, from the

\* Dan. viii. 22.

supposed number of seventy persons who made it, was most extensively used by the Jews, not only in foreign countries, but even in Judea itself, and was the means of making many of the heathens acquainted with the history of God's people, and with his holy law. Fifty years after this event the Egyptians lost Judea, which was taken from them by Antiochus the Syrian, "the king of the north," as the rulers of Syria are called in Daniel's prophecies, who came against them "with a great army and with much riches."\* This Antiochus, surnamed the Great, being dead, was succeeded by his son Seleucus, called in the prophecy "a raiser of taxes:"† and that he was so, to a most oppressive extent, appears from an account in the book of Maccabees, of his sending Heliodorus his treasurer to Jerusalem, with orders to bring away all the money which was laid up in the temple of God; an intent which, according to the author of that book, was frustrated in a miraculous manner, by the appearance in the temple of a horse and his rider, who struck Heliodorus to the ground under his feet.‡ The next king of Syria, called Epiphanes, according to the prophecy was to be "a vile person, who should obtain the kingdom by flatteries,"§ and overcome his adversaries rather by deceit than by force of arms,—a character which, however hateful violence may be, is one more hateful still—and indeed Epiphanes united in his what was most abominable in both of these; for, having afterwards gained some advantages over the Egyptians, and being prevented by fear of the Roman power from following them up, he turned his wrath against the defenceless Jews, and, not contented with plundering and desecrating their temple, setting up the

\* Dan. xi. 13.

† Ver. 20.

‡ 2 Macc. iii.

§ Dan. xi. 21.

abomination of desolation therein, he persecuted them in a most cruel manner, of which some shocking instances are recorded in the second book of Maccabees,\* showing at once the horrible disposition of the king, and the power of religion to support those who suffered the most atrocious torments, rather than renounce their law, or do an act forbidden by their God. It is probably concerning the tribulations of those days that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks, when he says, "others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings: they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."† These patient sufferers, however, did not constitute the whole body of the people; some there were who, through fear of death or hope of gain, meanly complied with the king's commandments, and sacrificed to the heathen idols, and some on the other hand who were zealous and bold enough to draw forth their swords in behalf of their country and religion. The first who did so was a priest, who dwelt in the city of Modin, Mattathias by name; he slew an apostate Jew, whom he saw publicly performing a heathenish sacrifice, and being supported by a chosen band of followers, among whom were his five sons, he kept up from that time a constant warfare against the enemies of Israel. The principal among those sons was Judas, called also Maccabeus, who after the death of his father succeeded to the chief command, and after gaining many advantages over the Syrians, was at last slain in a battle, in which with eight hundred men only, he had attempted to resist upwards of twenty thousand of the enemy. His brothers, Jonathan and Simon, carried on the noble enterprise which Matta-

\* 2 Macc. vi. vii. † Heb. ix. 35, 36, 38. 1 Macc. i. 53.

thias their father had begun ; they compelled their former masters to acknowledge their independence, and, having become successively high-priests, governed the land which they had rescued from oppression in peace and with honour.

Judas, when he regained possession of the temple, finding it profaned and plundered, made it his first care to restore it as much as possible to its former condition, and dedicated it anew with solemn ceremony to the worship of God ; in memory of which the Jews observed an annual festival at the beginning of winter, with mirth and gladness, a custom which continued down to the times of our Saviour, as we learn from the tenth chapter of St. John's gospel, where mention is made that it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter : and Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch ; showing us the place meet for them that keep holiday, and sanctioning the appointment of such days by the public authorities of the nation. And doubtless it was because the public authorities of the nation were at that time deeply impressed with the importance of religion, and looked upon the glory of God as the great end of all their labours, that they were blessed with such signal success, and were enabled to raise their country from the state of an enslaved province, to that of a flourishing and respected commonwealth ; for "righteousness" it is that "exalteth a nation ;" and "them that honour God, God will honour ;" sentences which ought to be engraven on every public building in the land, and on the hearts of every member of the community ; but most especially on those of its rulers, so that they may own them to be "in the hand of the Lord, and like the rivers of water to be turned by Him whithersoever he will." After the deaths of those noble brothers of the family of the Maccabees, the son of Simon succeeded to the



government, and for a time things went on well, but only for a time; dissensions arose in the ruling family, and those who thought themselves aggrieved, called in, fatally for themselves and their country, the assistance of the Romans.\* This nation, which was now rapidly extending its conquests over Europe, Africa, and Asia, was always ready to interpose as an umpire in the disputes of others, and never failed to make its interference serviceable to itself, by reducing both parties to subjection, and incorporating their territories into its own dominions. It also had been more than once foreshown in the prophecies of Daniel — being represented as the iron legs of the great image, which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, and explained to mean “the fourth kingdom, which should be as strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things, and as iron that breaketh all these, would it break in pieces and bruise.”† It was represented likewise under the appearance of “a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly, which had great iron

\* They did ill too, in invading the kingly office, to which, as descendants of Levi, however meritorious their services, they had no claim.

Milton (*Par. Lost*, xii. 349—360,) gives a striking summary view of the events of the period :—

“Returned from Babylon, by leave of kings,  
 Their lords, whom God disposed, the House of God  
 They first re-edify, and for a while,  
 In mean estate live moderate, till grown  
 In wealth and multitude, factious they grow;  
 But first among the priests dissension springs,  
 Men who attend the altar, and should most  
 Endeavour peace: their strife pollution brings  
 Upon the temple itself: at last they seize  
 The sceptre, and regard not David's sons;  
 Then lose it to a stranger, that the true  
 Anointed king Messiah might be born  
 Barred of his right.”

† Dan. ii. 40.

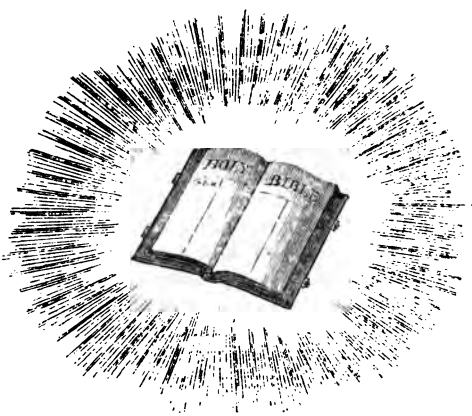
teeth, and devoured and brake in pieces and stamped the residue with the feet of it :”\* for this also was explained to mean “the fourth kingdom upon earth, which should be diverse from all kingdoms, and should devour the whole earth, and tread it down and break it in pieces.”† It was also represented as “a king,” rising up in the latter time of the Macedonian kingdoms, “when the transgressors were come to the full, who should destroy wonderfully, and prosper, and practise, and destroy the mighty and the holy people ; who, through his policy should cause craft to prosper in his hand ; who should magnify himself in his heart, and by peace should destroy many : who should stand up against the prince of princes.”‡

This formidable nation being called in to settle the disputes of Judea, acted according to their usual custom, and took possession of the country ; and being themselves soon afterwards divided into parties, first one and then the other became its masters, until this unsettled state of things was finally terminated by the accession of Augustus Cæsar to supreme authority over the whole Roman empire, and the appointment of Herod, son of Antipater the Edomite, to be, under him, king of Judea : a man in whose reign, disfigured as it is by cruelties of every description towards his own family and his subjects, this only is to be found deserving of commendation, that he undertook a thorough repair (so much so as almost to be considered as a rebuilding) of God’s holy temple, which through lapse of time had greatly fallen into decay. He was made king of the country thirty-six years before the birth of our Saviour Christ, at which time the history of the New Testament commences ; being a record of events eternally designed, in the deep counsels of God, to effect the most important changes

\* Dan. vii. 7.      † Ver. 23.      ‡ Ibid. viii. 23–25.

in the condition of mankind, and to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.

May we receive the information communicated unto us in that holy volume, with the trusting obedience of his professed servants, with the love and gratitude of miserable sinners redeemed from the sad bondage of sin and death—may we draw from its assurances direction of our way through life, defence against the world's temptations, and hope and comfort in our last hour; and may he bless our future meditations upon it in the retirement of our private chambers, or in his holy house—where on those who meet together unitedly in his name, the Lord God hath commanded of old the blessing, even life for evermore.





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